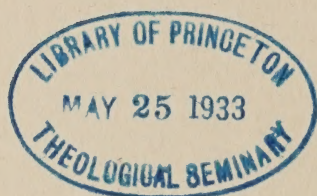


EDWIN  
MARKHAM

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WILLIAM L. STIDGER



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Stidger, William L. 1886-  
Edwin Markham





BOOKS BY WILLIAM L. STIDGER

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EDWIN MARKHAM

GOD IS AT THE ORGAN

A BOOK OF SUNSETS

THE EPIC OF EARTH

FLAMES OF FAITH

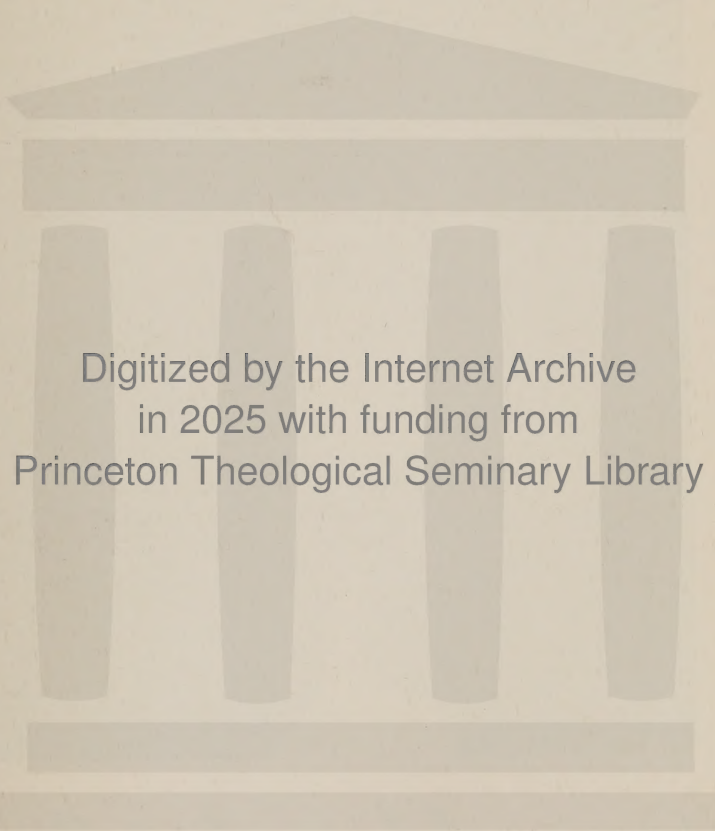
OUTDOOR MEN AND MINDS

STAR DUST FROM THE DUGOUTS

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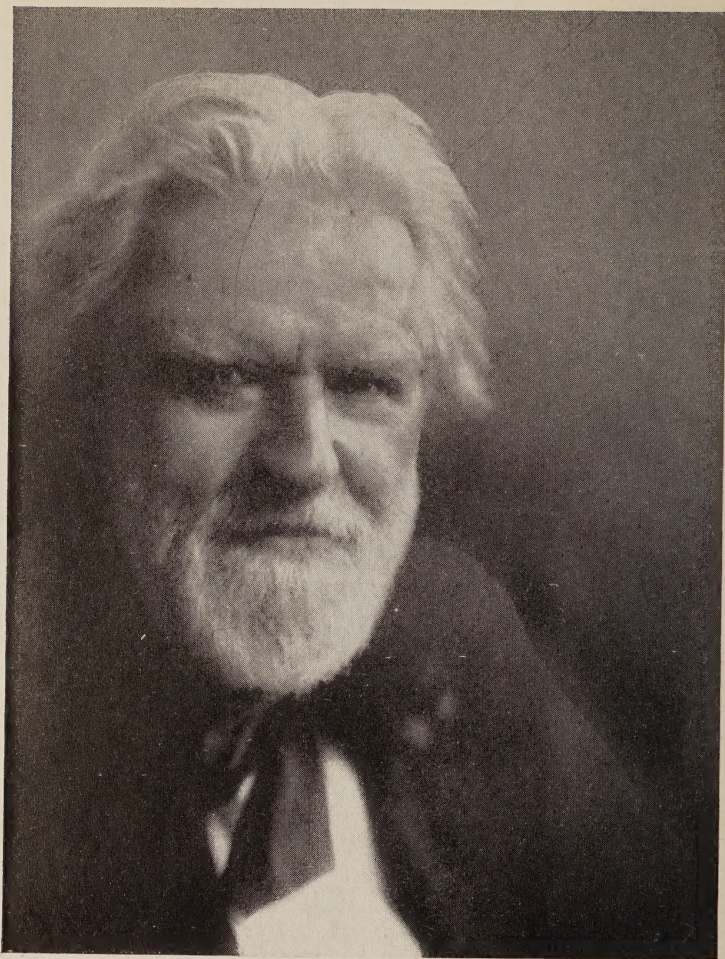
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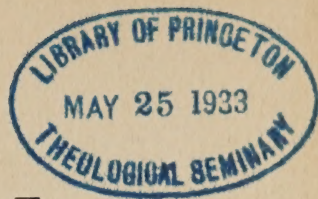


Courtesy "Miss White—Photographer," Kansas City, Mo.

Come, let us live the  
poetry we sing!  
Edwin Markham



✓  
EDWIN  
MARKHAM



✓  
WILLIAM L. STIDGER



NEW YORK

THE ABINGDON PRESS  
CINCINNATI

CHICAGO

STIDGER  
EDWIN MARKHAM

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DEDICATED TO  
MELVIN C. McCONNELL

*Understanding friend of both the poet and the  
author of this book*





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To All Friends:

I have not seen the manuscript nor the proof of this Markham volume, this discussion of my life and ideals, by Dr. Wm. L. Stidger.

Let me say, however, that the Doctor is fully equipt for writing this monograph. For one thing, he has spent a quarter of a century in studying my poetry and my life purposes. Perhaps no one else knows my poetry as well as Doctor Stidger.

Certainly, no one knows it better. Moreover, he knows my long passion for the Social Gospel, and he responds to it in his writings and in his teachings on platform and in pulpit. Finally, he spent his early manhood in California, so that he knows the atmosphere of my boyhood years in the land where I flung The Man with the Hoe out to the world in its brief forty-nine lines. This was in the dawn of the twentieth century. All these facts give the Doctor any authority he may need for this volume.

William L. Stidger has been a loyal, unforgetting and unforgettable friend. He has all the knowledge of my life and writings needed to expound my hopes and aspirations — my whole philosophy of existence.

Edwin D. Markham.



## INTRODUCTION

### "ALL STARS ARE GATHERED IN HIS HOROSCOPE"

**I**N his latest book of poems, *Eighty Songs at Eighty*, Edwin Markham chants in eight lines called "The Upward March," a poem which I want to use to introduce this book:

"The rise of man is endless; live in hope:  
All stars are gathered in his horoscope.  
The brute man of the planet, he will pass,  
Vanish like breath of vapor on a glass;  
And from his quaking pulp of life will rise  
The Superman, child of the higher skies.  
God-quicken'd, he will break these mortal bars,  
Laugh, and reach out his hands among the stars."

In this poet's long life of eighty years all the verities of existence seem to belong. He is the spiritual connecting link between the last century and the present century; between the world before the World War and the world since. He is a symbol of the old era and also of the new. He grew up in the old world of rugged individualism when a so-called "personal gospel" marked the limits of religious thinking; but he sounded the trumpet blast of the new social era in religion and in life. His conscious existence has run from the influences of the Civil-War period far into the aftermath of the World-War period of depression and unrest. He has had a dom-



inant part in the creation of the thought-molds of this century.

In selecting a thesis for the Simpson Lectures of De Pauw University which I gave this year it seemed good to present the first biographical interpretation of one of the great figures of the last eighty years, and to bring before this generation the stature of one of the giants of the earth who helped to make the world in which this generation lives.

This book is not presented as the final biography of Edwin Markham. It can be claimed fairly, however, that it will have within its pages the type of material from which future biographers may gather first-hand information for their work. For fifteen years I have sat with the poet through long and lovely hours in my own home and in his, probing into his past with his willing and friendly co-operation. During all of those years he has spent at least a month each year in my home and city. It has seemed to be worth while to gather the harvest of this material from the poet's own lips, while he is yet living and in possession of clear and unimpeded intellectual powers. This has been done carefully and with enthusiasm on both sides. It has been possible to have the poet himself check and recheck his own memory. In addition to this personal contact there has been access to all of the rich and abundant documents covering every hour of his adventuring life, as well as to a voluminous correspondence.

Because of his co-operation this has been more than a casual research. It has been possible to sit with the poet around many a glowing hearthfire and follow through to its fountainhead every great spiritual movement of his life in an attempt to trace what biographers call "the stream of consciousness," which is Edwin Markham.

What a rich contribution it would have been if some contemporary lover of John Milton had sat from time to time with that great blind poet, and had traced through that giant's memory the meaning and origin of every figure of speech in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*! What a contribution it would have been if some lover of William Shakespeare had done the same thing and had left his findings in some form; no matter how crude that form might have been! What an enlightening thing it would now be if we had the record of a friend who might have sat with Shakespeare around some friendly hearthfire at Stratford-on-Avon to probe into his mind in order to discover what Shakespeare meant to say in *Hamlet*! What a richness it would be if we should find the record of such a probe and should read, "William Shakespeare this night told me that he meant to say that Hamlet was not mad but wise"! If that had happened, we would not need in these days to indulge in so much conjecture, nor to debate as to whether or not Shakespeare actually wrote the plays credited to him; and ponder over what he meant by various symbols and

phrases. It would have saved a lot of wear and tear in the classrooms and libraries of the earth.

In this spirit of friendly research I have sat with Edwin Markham to trace, not only the meaning of his life and his inner-thought world, but also the meaning and sources of various figures of speech in his great poems.

It is generally agreed that the best interpretation of any man's life comes through an autobiography. If that is not available, the second best way to trace that man's "stream of consciousness" is through his own writings and letters.

In this treatment there has been a combination of these two methods, for I have had the unusual privilege of gathering the material in this book from the poet himself. Much of it will be presented in Mr. Markham's own words and phrases. Since the poet's first-hand and first-person quotations are available, it has seemed best to set forth considerable of the material of this book in the form in which it first came into being from the poet's own words.

At least the facts are down for permanent use. And that is well, for there is grave danger, with the pressure of work upon him, and many major tasks of writing yet unaccomplished, that even as energetic a man as Edwin Markham may not write an autobiography. In fact, it does not seem at all probable that he will find time to do so, even if he had the desire or intention to write such a book. There is still to come from his pen his long-looked-



for book on *The Forgotten Purposes of Jesus*, and his *Collected Poems*, on both of which he is now working and which he estimates it will take several years to get ready. Nor has it ever seemed to the poet himself that he would have what he calls "the daring" to write a book about himself, for he is intensely shy and modest about self-praise, or even self-revelation, save in his poetry. And, no matter what hopes we may have for future years in which he may live and labor, the fact still remains that he is eighty glorious years old, and eighty years are eighty years.

And now permit me to say that the poet, who owns his own copyrights, has given me full permission to use all of the quotations in this book from his poems and prose writings, both published and unpublished; and to use the material which he gave me in our many hours and days of communion.

In order that they may be found easily, mention has been made of the poems from which quotations have been taken and the books from which those poems come.



## CHAPTER I

### "A MENDOCINO MEMORY"

#### SOMETHING OF EDWIN MARKHAM'S ANCESTRAL AND PIONEERING BACKGROUND

ON an autumn evening not long ago I wandered through "Sleepy Hollow," in Concord, Massachusetts, with "the glory that the wood receives at sunset in its brazen leaves" all about me.

In this historical little God's Acre I read on ancient tombstones the names of Emerson, Hawthorne, Channing, Thoreau, Alcott. I scraped the moss away from one intriguing inscription and found a legend carved in deep, graceful letters of old English, telling the story of a New England lad who was the offspring, as that inscription informed me, of a "long line of Puritan pioneers and Concord ministers." But the last line of that legend seemed to leap out with words of fire: "And he was worthy of his lineage."

Edwin Markham also has back of him a long line of nonconformists, dissenters, rebels, poets, men of affairs in state and church; and he has been worthy of his lineage. And not only does he have this long line of fine progenitors reaching back into English history: he also has back of him the memory of a rich boyhood and young manhood spent in the pio-



neering communities of early Oregon and California.

In one of his poems written in later years, a poem which welled up out of his subconscious mind, he tells of those memories; tells of a day when, as a ten-year-old boy, he lay on his stomach, the green brakes bent for a bed, and looked down from a California mountainside into the blue distance toward the Pacific Ocean. As he lay there he pictured the world beyond that western sea, and the world to the east beyond the snow-clad peaks, and wondered, wistfully, what it all meant and where it reached.

Some of the lines of that poem are hauntingly beautiful:

"Once in my lonely, eager youth I rode  
With jingling spur, into the clouds' abode—  
Rode northward lightly as the high crane goes—  
Rode into the hills in the month of the frail wild rose,  
To find the soft-eyed heifers in the herds,  
Strayed north along the trail of nesting birds,  
Following the slow march of the springing grass,  
From range to range, from pass to flowering pass."

So shall we through Edwin Markham's title to this poem, "A Mendocino Memory," follow his life back "From range to range, from pass to flowering pass."

"I took the trail: the fields were yet asleep;  
I saw the last star hurrying to its deep."

So shall we take the trail of his life back to Eng-

lish shores; the trail of his ancestry, of his pioneering parents, from England to America; thence across this continent in an immigrant train to Oregon, to California; and thence back across the continent again; and around the earth. So runs this Markham trail.

"I climbed the canyon to a river-bed,  
And looking backward saw a splendor spread,  
Miles beyond miles, of every kindly hue  
And trembling tint the loom of Arras knew—  
A flowery pomp as of the dying day,  
A splendor where a god might take his way."

So shall we, in this chapter, with him, and through his "Mendocino Memory" climb "the canyon to a river-bed," and when we climb that height, we shall be "looking backward" and see "a splendor spread," "A splendor where a god might take his way."

And in that "Mendocino Memory" our poet looks back from that California hilltop and remembers Oregon, and visions of long yesterdays:

"High over Mendocino's windy capes,  
Where ships go flying south like shadow-shapes,  
Gleam into vision and go fading on,  
Bearing the pines hewn out of Oregon."

In imagination we too, with the ten-year-old boy on that mountainside of memory, peer back into the past from whence he came, back across those eastern mountains, and see a long line of stanch adherents of the Church of England. The Winchells, on his maternal side, derive their blood from Robert Winchell, who was made Archbishop of Canterbury in

1293. The line is Welsh and English in origin and is represented on the Continent by the names Winkel and Wüncchel.

Having espoused the cause of the Puritan dissenters early in the seventeenth century, the family suffered persecution in England, some representatives, accordingly, taking refuge in America, others in Holland. Later, descendants of the Holland branch came to America—the combined families at the present time numbering some three thousand members—and settled mostly in the New England and middle states. One of the earliest American Winchells is mentioned as having contributed to King Philip's war; and another, Robert Winchell, is mentioned in the most ancient records of the church at Windsor, Connecticut, as the first to pay for a sitting, while his young son is memorialized by an appointment to beat the drum, calling the congregation to service. Twenty persons of the name served in the Revolutionary War, seven in the War of 1812, and over sixty as privates, chaplains, and field officers in the Civil War. Throughout its history the family has been noted for intellectual vigor and aggressive activity in the affairs of church and state, many representatives having been noted as legislators, preachers, scientists and in other learned professions.

The poet himself adds:

"After my forefathers, the Winchells and the Markhams, had been in England since the arrival of William the Conqueror, they were ready to move



again to a new continent. So each branch came on a different ship to America with the early colonists. They stayed in New England until the United States got going; and then, after the Revolutionary War was finished, they started westward following the drift of emigration.

"After tarrying fifty or more years in the Northwest territory, in the states now known as Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois, and after Elizabeth Winchell and Samuel Markham had met and married, and some of their children had grown up, they concluded to trek still further westward. They went in a covered-wagon caravan, my father being captain of one of the migrant trains.

"After many adventures, they finally, in 1847, reached Oregon City, a thriving settlement, not far from the Pacific Ocean. There I was born in 1852 on April 23."

Behind this great American poet runs not only this long line of distinguished ancestors, serving their day in the church and in the state, but immediately back of him are the rugged lives of two pioneer parents, who contributed to him something of his remarkable strength of body and character. Mr. Markham always refers to his mother as a "Roman matron," and the glimpses we catch of her make us understand that characterization. It was she who gave him all of his early training, for his father died shortly after settling in Oregon when the boy was but seven years of age.

Edwin Markham remembers hearing many wild and adventuring stories of the continental crossing, which his mother used to tell him; tales of a buffalo stampede, when his young mother went out to get water at a nearby spring; and was caught in the vortex of these terrified animals; of how that mother was knocked down as several frightened buffalos passed over her. She could see nothing but the flying feet of frightened animals, and dust clouds passing over her head. But she came out of that with but three broken ribs, to go on to "the end of the trail," to settle in a little cabin in Oregon, and to give birth to this boy who was to carry to the ends of the earth her vigor, her vision, and her vibrant spirit. The poet himself tells of how he used to hear such stories of the covered-wagon trail:

"In setting out upon the long trail some man was elected captain, and usually his word was law. Ten to twenty miles was an ordinary day's travel of a train. The men walked; and some of the children, helping to drive the loose cattle, walked nearly all the way. A number of young men were selected to ride as scouts ahead, to trace the road and to find river fords, also to secure game and to find watering places for camping.

"Often have I heard my mother tell the story of her train, of which my father was the captain. As soon as a wayside well was reached, at or about sundown, the captain would sound the shrill horn or bugle, a signal to those behind to hasten on to the

camping-ground. One after one the wagons would creep in, forming a circle, leaving a goodly space inside for the women and children and the big blazing camp fire. This circle of wagons formed a sort of breastwork, behind which the men could fire their guns when attacked by the Indians.

"And now came two or more busy hours. The men unyoked their oxen or unhitched their mules and horses, and staked them out on the good pasture, while perhaps seven or eight armed men were appointed to guard them. It was rare indeed to find a train without its jew's-harp, its accordion, and its violin. And, if a train was headed for California, well-nigh everybody was ready to whistle or to sing the tune of the time:

'I soon shall be in Frisco,  
And then I'll look around;  
And when I see the gold lumps there,  
I'll pick them off the ground.

'O California,  
That's the land for me:  
I'm bound for San Francisco,  
With my washbowl on my knee.'

"There were tragic happenings also, many of them. Cholera laid its heavy hand upon the earlier emigrant trains. Sometimes it ascended the Mississippi, from New Orleans, and overtook the emigrants as they were entering the wilderness. The early rains re-enforced the plague, so that the first three hundred miles of the trail were marked by

graves—graves now long obliterated and forgotten. Bayard Taylor tells us that in some instances 'the sufferer was left to die alone by the roadside, while his panic-stricken companions pushed forward, vainly trusting to get beyond the influence of the epidemic.' "

"Of course an overland train was in constant peril from the Indians. It is a notable fact that in the first early months of overland travel they were not hostile, but looked on wonderingly. As the months wore on, however, the Indians began to attack, provoked doubtless by the folly and injustice of the emigrants. So the trainmen were ever on the alert; at night the camp was always guarded by armed pickets, for at any hour the Indians were likely to swoop down with wild whoops, discharge their arrows, stampede and steal the cattle and horses. Many a time my father and his men fought off the savages, sometimes in the day, sometimes in the dead of night."

But the one story which impressed him most of all and which is the classical tale of those terrible, pioneering days was the story of the Donner Party, which he himself retells as he heard it from his mother in early boyhood days:

"I heard one of these tragic stories told frequently in my young boyhood; and thousands of times has it been told in half whispers in mountain cabins, when the wind was wailing eerily down the pine-watched canyons—told also in hushed cottages in the



great valleys, during the long evenings when the world was whitening with mysterious mist blowing inward from the sea. This was the story of the Donner Party, the *Iliad* of the immigrants.

"The Donner family (persons of fine culture and ample means) were going into the new land to found a school and establish a store. They and the rest were unusually harmonious and happy till they reached Utah. Then happened one of those chances that carry fate. It was decided by some of the wagons to take a cut-off, which a babbler had proclaimed would save eight hundred miles. The greater number of the train kept to the regular traveled road, and reached California in safety; but eighty-three persons (mostly the Donners, the Reeds, and their friends and relatives) swerved from the main body, taking the supposed shorter route to the south of Salt Lake.

"This newly chosen road proved to be an obscure trail; and the cattle were exhausted with their desperate struggle by the time they reached the alkali desert in Nevada. Food also was growing ominously scarce: the supply could not last long. This sent a new terror on the far wanderers, at the edge of winter, on an untried road in a strange land. After a council two volunteers pushed on ahead to seek for help from Sutter's Fort. And here I wish to record the name of Charles T. Stanton, the name of the heroic volunteer who made his difficult way to safety, and yet was moved by humanity to return

with the guides to give further help to his comrades locked up in the awful cold and desolation of the Sierras.

“Soon the roads were all blocked; so the weary travelers abandoned their wagons, packed their animals as heavily as possible and pushed on. But the ever-falling snows obliterated every vestige of the trails; and in one terrific night they buried all the cattle and soon buried pines and spruces up to their first branches. Certain branches chopped off for fuel show the snow to have been twenty-two feet deep. The intrepid guides who had come to the rescue of the party were also caught in this awful coil of circumstance.

“Here was the little company in their last desperate camp, pitched near what is now known as Donner Lake, and here for four months death and sorrow were the only sentinels. Each family dug out for themselves a cavern-cabin in the deep snow. The food was doled out; it ran low; then . . . it was exhausted. Now with long poles the starving men began to probe into the snow, under shelter of the trees where the cattle had been wont to huddle, and sometimes a trace of blood showed where to dig for an ox. Even the hide was cooked and eaten. Only the bare bones remained.

“The final party of rescue went out through almost fathomless snows, and they found one survivor in the Camp of Death, one who had kept his life as the vulture lives—a huge cripple with a coarse

sensual countenance, a being that seemed half animal, half man, seated alone like a ghoul in a charnel house. He took a sort of fiendish satisfaction in his grim feasting, and the rescuers found it difficult to drag him from his den. No one of the creations of Victor Hugo's genius is more darkly terrible than this ogre of the mountains.

"Thus the four long months in this tragic camp were ended. Only one half of the snow-bound company ever passed over the Sierras to find the sunny valleys of California. The other half escaped out of this Malebolge of misery by the way of the Valley of the Shadow."

The two pioneering Markham parents were more fortunate than the Donner Party, for they took the northern trail into Oregon, and arrived safely at their haven. Mr. Markham himself, in speaking of this period of their lives, says:

"I remember vividly the Willamette Falls at our back door and the Indians that paraded into my mother's store. My mother not only kept a store to help make a living but she also planted the apple seeds she had brought from Michigan with her, so that she unconsciously became, like the famous Johnny Appleseed of the mid-West, one of the early apple growers of the Northwest, a section now famous for this product of the soil. She was also the poet laureate of the new settlement, the earliest woman writer recorded in Oregon. Her verse celebrated all the local affairs, such as the arrival of

ships, the deaths of pioneers, the flight of strange birds."

It is interesting to note in passing that the poet himself has always been famous as a writer of "occasional poems." He was selected to write his now famous Lincoln Poem by the Republican Club of New York City, to celebrate a Lincoln birthday at the beginning of this century. He was selected by the city of Boston to write the tercentennial Ode, and delivered it on the Boston Common. He also was chosen by the government to write the Washington Poem, celebrating the Bicentennial of the birth of George Washington. Scores of other such occasional poems have come from his pen. Back to his poet mother, who celebrated the great events of this pioneer community in Oregon, we go for this influence. Back to this maternal influence we go even to discover the first source of his poetic genius.

He says little of his father after their arrival in Oregon except that he was not a good provider, and that the burden of the family economics fell on his mother. "My father was a farmer and a hunter and died in Oregon when I was about seven years of age."

Perhaps the most exciting story of Edwin Markham's boyhood in Oregon—indeed, the story which lured the Markham mother with her two boys to California, into the Suisun Hills—was the story of the discovery of gold in California. This story is so much a part of his formative years that it must be told in his own words:



"In the year 1848 Captain Sutter needed a flour mill: that need was the small lever, that, later, moved the world. Now, this need of a man caused James W. Marshall to rise upon the horizon of world events.

"So the bargain was made: Marshall was to go up into the Sierra foothills and find a grove of pines at a point on some river that could float the lumber down to Sacramento. Thus would the flour mill take form—also other buildings that existed in the dream of Sutter. A spot was chosen at Coloma on the south ford of the American River.

"But there was a special obstacle; the mill wheel rigged up by Marshall did not have a tail-race deep enough, so every night he let a big current of water rush through it to wash out more sand and gravel. One sparkling January morning Marshall, following his custom, went down to shut off this current of water and give directions for the day. As the water slowed down he saw a particle shining on a muddy stone. It was about half as big as a pea. Was it gold? He reached for it, bit it, hammered it: it was malleable. Yet it seemed to his eye too dead yellow for gold.

"He strided back to the house where the men were at breakfast, and asked the wife of the foreman to try it in saleratus water to see if it would tarnish. She was making soap at the time, and plunged the bright particle into her lye-kettle. It came out as bright as ever.

“And now Henry Bigler rises into our ken as a member of the working force and a writer of chronicles. He was an impressionist in orthography (a forerunner of our spelling reformers) and a realist in narration, as is shown by the following entry in his laconic journal: ‘January 24, 1848: this day some kind of mettle was found in the tailrace that look goald, first discovered by James Martial, the Boss of the Mill.’

“By March the California papers were telling the ‘secret’; and packets of the Coloma gold were being offered for sale in some of the ports. Then a sudden brain-storm swept the coast, and men of every calling began to rush for the gold mines. Newspapers were stopped; churches were emptied; stores were abandoned; ships were deserted by both crews and officers. No hope of reward and no fear of penalty made any contracts binding. Indeed, ‘the party of the first part’ and ‘the party of the second’ were frequently off together, making rapid strides and far away. Those who stayed behind demanded and received soaring salaries, which compensated them a little for the gold they were losing!

“But how did things go with James W. Marshall? His story is one of the ironies of fate. The man who touched the spring that filled the coffers of the world got little or nothing for himself.

“I knew Marshall for many years, and made several visits to his grim little cabin on the hillside above Coloma. It was a dingy hut, some twelve feet

square, made of logs and picked-up lumber; and it was typical of thousands of miners' cabins scattered through the hills in the early days. The interior of the cabin had none of the home-touches a woman so often gives even to the rudest shack. In one corner was a cracked and greasy stove; at one wall was a grim, narrow bunk for sleeping; in the center was a grease-marked, melancholy table; and looking sadly on all the spectacle were three or four tottering and disheartened chairs. There were also one or two sad little windows that the dust darkened and the flies haunted.

"Marshall spent his last years in the little scoop in the hills where he discovered gold. He had a large, bony frame, stooped shoulders, a broad, bearded face. His clothes, dingy and brown, hung loosely upon his body. He was 'a drinking man,' but not a drunkard, as some writers have said. Yet he dealt in ceaseless volumes of vapory talk; and he could frequently be seen on the street of the little village, hold some neighbor with his glittering eye, gesticulating the while, and ending every other sentence with a meaningless, 'You understand me?' He was a strange, vague character.

"Yet it must be said of Marshall that he was good-natured and neighborly. I soon discovered that he was inclined to tamper with Spiritism, and his habit appears to have 'rattled' his mind. He once loaned me a queer manuscript from his pen, which purported to be 'a communication from the spirits.' On

certain important pages of Western history he is called 'half spiritist and half Mormon.' As a further light on this curious personality, I may say that he presented me with a strange volume on 'Biblical Archeology,' one that included an elaborate discourse on the Hierophants of Baalbek and Persepolis.

"Thirty years or more after his discovery Marshall was found in his dark little cabin dead 'in his boots,' lying full-dressed on his barren bunk, his hat drawn over his eyes. Thus alone and in poverty died the man whose discovery had filled the coffers of all nations."

Markham also gives us a glimpse of his boyhood memory of tending his mother's sheep and cattle in those early days, a memory which is invaluable to an understanding of the influences which shaped the expanding consciousness of the poet:

"In my boyhood, cattle-raising ran almost neck and neck with grain-raising. In my secluded little valley in the Suisun Hills, the rodeo was the most exhilarating spectacle in the round year. I well remember that some time in the spring or the summer word would go flying from lip to lip that the cattle-king of our meridian had fixed upon a certain week for the great event. Early on the first morning of the appointed week I vaulted into my saddle (for I was the young vaquero of my mother's cattle range), and I was soon ascending the ridges above the canyons to the heads of the streams in the far



hills, where the cattle loved to gather and graze in the sheltered hollows.

"Frequently on the way I would fall in with some comrade of the ranges bent upon the same business, and we would go on together in quest of hoofed and horned adventure. Wherever we found cows or steers or heifers, we started them down the canyons toward the little valley with the lake in the heart of it. The cattle might be grazing on the hillside or they might be lying down at their ease under shady trees, or in the high, cool oats in some happy covert. But our advent was the end of their idle roamings and ruminations. Seeing our whirling lassos and hearing our loud halloos, they were soon flying before us down the long canyons, crashing through the tall mustard, scattering the manzanita berries, startling the quails in their hiding-places, skirting the buckeye groves and setting a thousand boughs astir. I fancy that the fleeing cattle enjoyed it all as much as the young vaqueros on their snorting, smoking mustangs."

The drama of Markham's life has had three major physical and geographical settings: the first, or boyhood period in the pioneering locale of an Oregon settlement; the second, or young manhood period, in the Suisun Hills of California, and the third in the environments of New York City and Brooklyn, New York. He has never traveled outside of the boundaries of his own nation.

Also, just as his life has had three major geo-

graphical settings, so has it been influenced in its early years by three great epochs of American life. The first was the pioneering epoch, stirring tales of which he heard from his mother's lips in his boyhood because she had just taken part, as we have seen, in one of the early caravan crossings of the American continent. The second was the aftermath of the Civil War. On all sides, with wide-eyed wonder, this imaginative boy heard talk of that great war, and especially of Abraham Lincoln. He listened with eager interest to these great stories of valor and victory. Reflections of both of these epochs in American history we see in his poetry, particularly in the poem on Lincoln. The third epoch which greatly influenced his early thinking was the discovery of gold in California. In fact, his entire boyhood and young manhood were spent in the wild aftermath of these three epochs, and he unconsciously absorbed their spirit. The color of high adventure is in him and in his poetry, for tall tales of these great epochs saturated his thinking. He lived in the "Arizona Afterglow" of them. Hear his own words:

"A man cannot escape from his past. Even in my own dug-out log cradle I heard the first thunders of the coming storm which was to break over our Union. My people, always nonconformists and 'come-outers,' were Abolitionists, of course, and they followed, as best they could in those days when news traveled slowly, the discussions and arguments that led up to our Civil War. Even in our hill-girded

cattle range in Central California, where my people had moved from Oregon, I was old enough to hear and remember its awful reverberations."

It was in these rugged environments, and while listening to the stories of these three great epochs of American life, that the boy Edwin was nurtured. Here he grew to young manhood, with his three months a year of schooling. Here it was that the great School of Nature opened its doors to his matriculation. Here in these California hills he attended "The Old Black School" until he was dreaming of college. Here it was that in these early California days he met "The Enchanter" who opened the world of poetry to him. Here it was that he caught his first glimpse of the Comrade Kingdom, as he calls it. After the lure of gold had called his mother from Oregon into the Suisun Hills of California, the years of his young boyhood passed swiftly with little schooling and much tending of his mother's cattle and sheep until a day came when another golden lure called him; the lure of a college education.

One bright morning, when he was about seventeen years of age, he decided, as many another adventuring spirit has done, to run away from home. College was his ultimate destination. He did not have any well-defined plans, but he wanted to get out into that wider world which he had seen from his California hilltop and which he so graphically describes in "A Mendocino Memory."

It was no unusual thing for this boy to go for long journeys on the back of his buckskin broncho.

"Where to?" he asked himself.

"I'll ride in the direction I know least," he said in answer to his own query, and turned his broncho's head toward the far-off, blue, and hazy summits of the Coast Range. But he soon found himself mixed up in a strange adventure.

Late one evening he was stopped by Black Bart, a notorious, hairy, bearded bandit of that region. The bandit took him to his camp and kept him for weeks a prisoner. He liked this young adventuring boy and begged young Markham to join his band of robbers. Then it was that Markham poured out to Black Bart the tale of his desire to go to college. The bandit was interested but seemed to scorn the boy's desire for an education. Finally seeing, however, that the lad was in dead earnest, he let him go his way.

The boy rode for more than three hundred miles on the back of his broncho—wild, adventuring miles. He remembers swimming swollen streams, and dancing naked around a camp fire to keep warm while his clothes dried out. He remembers sleeping on green boughs, and hiding away in deep caves, killing wild game, cooking his meals over his own camp fires, living the wild life of a nomad for more than six months. Finally he got a job on a ranch, and had about decided to settle down for life as a rancher, when one morning he awakened, amazed



and astonished to find that his mother had followed his trail in an old buckboard. It had taken her six months to find him, but she never gave up the search. He was all she had left. That day they had a talk and she said to him: "Since you are determined on going to Teachers' College, I've made up my mind to help you all I can. But first I want you to go back home where we'll work and save money to send you to college."

Not many weeks after he had returned to the Suisun Hills with his mother an adventure came to him which made it seem that the very gods were looking down with friendly interest on his ambitions. Or, was it Black Bart who, when he found that he could not persuade this strange boy to join his band of robbers, had come to have a friendly interest in him as they talked around his comrade camp fires? Might it not have been that this modern Robin Hood, having heard the boy's eager story of his dreams of an education, had actually determined to make it possible for the dream to come true? In any case a miracle came into young Markham's life. As we think of it in these civilized and undramatic days it sounds like a story from fiction, but it must be remembered that that boyhood was spent in pioneer days when brigands and robbers infested the country. This is the story as the poet tells it himself:

"I went home with my mother as she wished me to do, promising to remain until the college opened. One day, close beside a big rock on a path by our

house, I was digging for soap root, a root which makes lather suitable for the family wash. Under this rock where the soap root ran, my pick suddenly crashed upon what seemed to me to be metal. However, when I stooped over I pulled out a canvas bag. I turned it up and something fell out at my feet with a metallic ring. It was gold. I rubbed it on my breeches. It *was* gold, a twenty-dollar gold piece! Under that rock someone, a miner—or it might have been my friend Black Bart—had buried a bag of gold; in five, ten, and twenty-dollar pieces, more than nine hundred dollars in all.

“For me that was the legendary pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. That find, as well as mother’s change of heart, made it possible for me to go on to San José to school.”

During his schooldays in San José, California, Markham worked in a blacksmith shop. He has always known the lot of the toiler, of whom he writes with such an understanding heart. After two years in the Normal School at San José he taught school for a few months in San Luis Obispo, and here one of the most fascinating experiences of his early life came to him. This was in 1872.

He was twenty years of age, tall, awkward, loose-jointed and youthful in appearance. His years of schooling had not taken the tan from his cheeks, for even during those years in San José he had toiled in the great out-of-doors for his living as well as in the blacksmith shop.

Nine pupils waited for him in San Luis Obispo, but there was no place in which to teach them. The cattlemen and farmers were embarrassed at such a state of affairs but had to confess that they had no schoolhouse ready.

"That being the case," said the young teacher, "we don't need a school house, but a citadel of learning! Lend me an ax and the help of some good right arms, and we'll have a schoolhouse in no time."

"At that," says the poet himself, "there was a building bee. Saplings were cut down with pointed ends like stakes, and we made a palisade inclosure around a huge oak tree, the foliage of which was so dense that no ordinary rain could penetrate it in the few months that we had rain in California. Inside of this crude shelter of an old tree we set up nine tables all made by hand and one for the teacher."

In this rustic schoolhouse the young teacher, besides teaching "the three Rs," read to his nine pupils the poems of Whittier, Byron, Tennyson, Bryant, and Tom Moore, because these poets had meant so much to him, coming to him as they did from a country-school teacher, such as he himself was at that time.

When he had finished this exciting adventure of teaching school in a schoolhouse made of trees, he returned to college, but this time he went to Christian college, in Santa Rosa, Luther Burbank's town, where he had heard that he could find work and get

a college degree. In two years that degree was obtained, and back to Eldorado County he went, to his boyhood home, back to the hills from whence he had come; back to his old familiar haunts where he had tended his mother's sheep and cattle.

Life moved with great rapidity for this young school-teacher. In a few years he was called to Oakland, California, as the head of the Teachers' Training College. It was while he was in Oakland that he caught his first glimpse of the original painting of Millet's "The Man With the Hoe." And there he wrote the poem "The Man With the Hoe," and overnight became famous.

With the writing of that great poem his life enters a new epoch. The world took note of this California poet and called him to New York City, then the center of the literary life of the nation. And there he has remained, always homesick for California and the great west from which he sprang.

Markham brought with him not only his "Man With the Hoe," his California and Oregon background, his "Mendocino Memory"; but a beautiful young California girl named Anna Catherine Murphy, whom he had married in 1897, just two years before "The Man With the Hoe" was written. Mr. Markham had been married before but, after living for only a few years in an ill-mated matrimony, there was a friendly and mutual agreement to separation. This first marriage had no lasting influence on his life or career. Anna Catherine



Murphy Markham had much to do with the inspiration of that first poem and was the first to recognize in it the stuff of which fame is made. When he arrived in the East, he was heralded as the author of this great social poem, hailed as the trumpeter of "the battle-cry of the next thousand years."

Of Anna Catherine Markham much might be said. It could be said that she has been a constant inspiration to the poet; a critic as keen as ever was born; recognized as such by the poet himself; a woman who in her own right has become a poetess of ability; who once conducted the page of poetry in the *Literary Digest*; and who has always been of immense aid in the prolific work Edwin Markham has done as an anthologist. It was she who helped the poet in that stupendous task of compiling and editing the ten-volume anthology of world poetry called *The Book of Poetry*, the like of which, both in its range and beauty, has never been compiled before, and which stands to-day as the most comprehensive and authoritative anthology of world poetry yet published.

Mrs. Markham, who was a teacher in California when she met the poet, had sworn never to marry a man with a beard and never to marry a school-teacher. "But he wrote such wonderful poetry about love that I forgot my objections," she says.

Beautiful has been the comradeship between these two poets and human beings; a refreshing comradeship in these days of domestic entanglements. They

know how to laugh as well as love. Each has a keen sense of humor.

Mrs. Markham tells with merriment of how the poet's mother took her son to a phrenologist. After examining the boy he said: "Madam, your son is one hundred per cent in everything but one. He has absolutely no sense of the time element." Then Mrs. Markham adds with a chuckle: "And that has influenced me more than anything else to believe in phrenology.

"We have a solemn pact never to worry about each other. He goes away and stays away for weeks at a time. Once I got marooned in the Staten Island ferry house all night when heavy rains had washed out the car lines. I slept through until morning there and Mr. Markham never missed me at all. Our solemn pact is never to be disturbed about one another until we hear from the police. And up to this time that has never happened."

Mr. Markham's pet name for Mrs. Markham has always been "the Madonna." When he comes to visit us in Boston without his big *sombrero*, which we like to have him wear because he wears it so much more becomingly and rightly than Tom Mix ever could, he says, "The Madonna forgot to put it in." And I suspect that "the Madonna" did not want him to wear it. That is where that lovely woman and I disagree, for somehow that hat seems to fit the personality of this Western poet. That hat certainly fits into his atmosphere better than some of the

little round Dutch-looking hats which he picks up from pegs in restaurants.

One day Mrs. Markham disclaimed this "Madonna" title, which the poet has been using for forty years. She said: "There's nothing saintly or meek about my Celtic temper, and my Irish laugh. Besides, saints don't go around giggling as I do."

It is this "Madonna" whom he brought from California, who has adjusted herself to the poet's eccentricities of living, his other-worldliness, his strange hours for working and sleeping, his wanderings about the country regardless of time and place. It was she who heard the first reading of his great poem, "The Man With the Hoe," and she is the one who sat up with him all night when he wrote "Lincoln, the Man of the People," heard its first reading, and pronounced it great. It was she who mothered their son Virgil into young manhood, through the University of California, and into his own career as a writer of fiction. It was she who conserved the family finances, and made them reach to impossible lengths; who has pleasantly entertained the great of the earth in her humble Staten Island cottage; princes, kings, queens, authors, statesmen, prize fighters; for they all make a beaten footpath to this humble home of genius.

In this "Mendocino Memory" in which we briefly review his life I sat with the poet one evening and asked him to give me a picture of the "Giant Hours" of his career. Those mountain peaks of his expe-

rience loom up in his mellow memory like the peaks of his Sierra Nevada mountains.

There was the memory of the hour when he first became acquainted with the teachings of Jesus, in the Old Black Schoolhouse in California, and caught his first vision of the social meaning of the Gospels; the memory of the year that he plowed a neighbor's field and earned twenty dollars with which to buy his first books of poetry; the great hour when he read Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and *The Man Who Laughs*; his graduation from Teachers' College when he gave the valedictory on the theme "Genius in Ruins"; a memory of the year 1893 when he was asked to deliver the Commencement address at Stanford University and met David Starr Jordan, who later had much to do with popularizing "The Man With the Hoe"; the memory of that dramatic hour when he first saw Millet's great painting; the great hour when he wrote "Lincoln, the Man of the People," and of how, when he delivered it for the first time before the Republican Club at Delmonico's restaurant in New York City, Chauncey M. Depew, who presided, sneered at the mention of "The Man With the Hoe" when he introduced Markham; the memory of that day in 1904 when the poet led a band of other poets in the establishment of the first Poetry Society in America; the rich memory of the day that he was invited by President Taft to deliver his Lincoln poem at the dedication of the beautiful Lincoln Memorial in Wash-



ington; the memory of the day when his poem was inscribed on the walls of the Lincoln Memorial at Hodgenville, Kentucky, in that white Greek temple which enshrines the log cabin in which Lincoln was born; the memory of his birthday in 1930, when he was elected a member of "The Academy," which is made up of only fifty names, and which corresponds to the French Academy of the "Forty Immortals"; and, finally, that most recent memory of the Carnegie Hall celebration, on April 23, 1932, in honor of his eightieth birthday, when a message from President Hoover was read and that great auditorium was crowded with thousands of the great and the near-great of America, gathered to pay him homage.

Here is a swift sweep and survey of the poet's life, a chapter dealing with his great memories and forming a background for the chapters that are to follow, dealing in more detail with the great movements of his life.

## CHAPTER II

### "SOFTLY AS THE GRASSES GROW"

#### SOMETHING OF THE INFLUENCE OF NATURE IN HIS LIFE

EDWIN MARKHAM has been a child of nature.

Dr. George A. Gordon, in his now classical autobiography, *My Education and Religion*, writes an entire chapter on "The Influence of Nature."

In the opening paragraphs of that book he says:

"The influence of nature is coeval with our existence; it is something deep, mystic, unfathomable, and absolutely past finding out in the totality of its power. In the first place, nature is an unconscious admixture with our being; in the second place, by reflection, by thought, it becomes a conscious, continuous, ineffable admixture with our existence."

If that was true of this Scotch, Boston preacher, how much more so is it true of Edwin Markham, who was raised in the very heart of the greatest wonderland of the world, "California the beautiful," as the poet calls it.

The boy Markham grew from childhood as one of his poems prays that he might grow:

“Teach me, Father, how to go  
Softly as the grasses grow,  
Hush my soul to meet the shock  
Of the wild world as a rock;  
But my spirit propt with power,  
Make as simple as a flower.  
Let the dry heart fill its cup,  
Like a poppy looking up;  
Let life lightly wear her crown,  
Like a poppy looking down.

“Teach me, Father, how to be  
Kind and patient as a tree.  
Joyfully the crickets croon  
Under shady oak at noon;  
Beetle, on its mission bent,  
Tarries in that cooling tent.  
Let me, also, cheer a spot,  
Hidden field or garden grot—  
Place where passing souls may rest  
On the way and be their best.”<sup>1</sup>

So Edwin Markham, under the kindly influences of nature, has grown, “Softly as the grasses grow.”

When a little child he lived in the shadow of an old Oregon cliff. From five years of age to young manhood he lived in the Suisun Hills, neighboring with the mountains, the rivers, lofty peaks, the mighty trees of California. He himself gives us an interpretation of the meaning of those days and of nature's influence on him.

“I was brought into robust contact with the open air, with soil and sun; with great cliffs that soared perpendicularly into the clouds; with flurries of

<sup>1</sup> From *The Man With the Hoe, and Other Poems*.

rain, which scattered bright drops on all the leaves of the encircling trees, and with vast cornfields, green and happy, filled with swordlike leaves which leaped when the glad wind rushed over them. I feel that it is a misfortune for anyone to grow up in wealth and sheltered homes, where they miss the outdoor experience.

“Big influences were pressing upon my youth in those days. Not only did I work in my mother’s orchard and garden; I also rode my broncho on the slopes and over the tops of the hills, herding cattle or hunting for them when they strayed away in the canyons of far-off ranges. Countless times I have strained my eyes and gazed over the Sacramento plains toward the far-off ghostly line of the Sierras. These things widened my horizon, these things as well as the books that I read.

“As my eyes traveled over the vast expanses of the glorious land, decked with trees and flowers under a boundless blue heaven, I slowly but surely began to feel that the Creator who had made all this certainly did not intend that some men should be consigned all their lives to the ‘bottomless pit,’ that abyss of civilization in which the submerged millions are struggling and perishing.”

In almost every utterance of the poet we catch the echo of nature’s thunder blasts, her lightning flashes, her whispering winds, as is illustrated in a recent summary of the great movements of poetry given by the poet to a group of his friends.



"The first epic poem was the stars in the heavens, the first lyric was the murmur of the wind and the boom of the surf, the first dramatic poem is life itself, and the first critic was the serpent in the garden of Eden."

Some writer has said that any creative artist is largely molded in the impressionable years of childhood by three things: the epoch in which he finds himself, the race from which he springs, and his physical surroundings. If that statement is true, then Edwin Markham was literally bombarded, saturated, shot through into the very white core of his soul by great events and by nature. While still a mere child, as we have seen, he listened to the tales told by his father and mother, who, with thousands of others, pioneered the American continent. He spent his boyhood listening to the reverberations which were still sounding from the Civil War. He lived in his young manhood within sight and sound of the gold rush to California, one of the great epochs in the opening of the West. But most dominant of all in the universe of this boy was the influence of "The Norn Mother," to which he refers in his Lincoln poem.

From *California the Wonderful* I quote some of his own words:

"California is well-nigh as familiar to me as my garden paths; I spent forty years and more within her boundaries. I was there as a barefoot boy picking wild berries in the fields near Vacaville, herd-

ing sheep on the Suisun Hills, plowing the little valleys between the ridges for wheat and barley, and following the thrashing machine in the time of harvesting."

One might wish that every lover of nature could have the privilege of reading Markham's *California the Wonderful*, for only then will he begin to understand the romance, the wild beauty of that great state; and then only will he be able to catch the first faint gleams of the influences of the world of nature on this tender spirit. Hear him in this picture of his boyhood:

"There were the sheep by the roadside under a kindly tree, or else in the friendly shelter of some great bluff. It makes me think of my boyhood when I was lost in the lonely hills at night:

'I huddled close against a mighty cliff.  
A sense of safety and of brotherhood  
Broke on the heart: the shelter of a rock  
Is sweeter than the roofs of all the world.'

"Here were bedchambers sweeter than the chambers in the palaces of kings. You do not know the full joy of night and sleep unless at some time you have crept in for slumber under a big pine that has shaken down a mattress of fragrant needles, and that extends above you its low green rafters, and wafts upon you a soft incense of healing balm. Nor do you know the fullness of night's content unless at some time you have crept unto the shelter of a great rock, and stretched out upon the sweet, warm

earth, knowing that you are safe from all the winds that blow."

Never have there been descriptions of Mount Shasta, Lake Tahoe, the Yosemite Valley, and El Capitán more beautiful than those of our poet in *California the Wonderful*. His pen picture of Mount Shasta gives to the reader a sight of his soul which ordinarily is not seen:

"Shasta shines jewel-like upon the front of the spacious north, where the two great ranges draw together. The colossal mountain, rising sudden and solitary, and soaring nearly three miles toward the skies, holds his sovereignty over all the region within the radius of a hundred miles. From time immemorial Shasta has been a wonder and a sign to Indian and Caucasian on land and on sea.

"The mountain is beautiful in any hour, standing lonely and supreme, clothed in mystical samite—the white of eternal snows—a silent and massive pyramid outlined against the sky. But, flushed by the evening Alpenglow, he rises to a supernal loveliness. In this luminous hour the mountain burns with an amethystine luster that seems unearthly—burns with a supernal radiance, as if all the dawns since the youth of the world were mingled in one transcendent splendor of the falling night.

"Evermore an unspeakable sublimity hovers over this mountain Agamemnon of the old wars of ice and fire, and flood. His glaciers are still alive on the northern declivity; his volcanic craters were

cooled only yesterday as we reckon it in the almanac of geology; and his serene head is crowned with eternal snow.

“There is no other mountain of all the peaks of the State that offers so gracious an approach. Mount Whitney is higher; but the tall Shasta peak stands on a low floor only four thousand feet above the level of the sea; and thus this mountain appears to be higher than Whitney, whose modest peak rises from a floor that is eleven thousand feet above the sea. Moreover, Whitney is companioned by a group of mountains, all nearly of the same height; while Shasta stands alone, dominating all the world around.

“From the summit of Shasta the eye can travel far away over the misty green of the redwoods to the dim azure of the sea in the west. On the north you behold the outline of the mountains of Oregon; and on the northeast the Lava Beds, where from a labyrinth of caverns the Modoc Indians fought their terrible last battle. Far to the south you see the endless flight of the two great ranges, and between them the long stretch of the Sacramento Valley, threaded by the river, whose fountain-head is at the base of the mountain.

“Shasta is garmented with immensity and austerity, yet he has also his quiet moods and his friendly intimacies. In the shadow of his beautiful cone-bearing forests the deer, the quail and the grouse are at home and happy, as are the wild sheep on the



higher levels. In the chaparral zone, on the low foothills, no wedding bower of June is so lovely as are the wild summer gardens there. In the warm watered soil are miles of wild roses, azaleas, tall white lilies and all the rest of the host of color and perfume. And here, as in the white sage and chaparral of distant San Bernardino, the wild bees find the pastures of a paradise.

“And here too is the chrysamphora (Darlingtonia) a remarkable, pitcher-plant belonging to a leafy family with the inspiring name of sundew; yet it is not content with the sun and the dew and the essences of earth, for it also captures and digests unwary insects in its honeyed and hooded trumpet. This carnivorous flower is found only in the marshes of Shasta and in the cold bogs of the north. On higher levels of the mountain the snow-plant pushes up like a sturdy mushroom through the carpet of pine needles. There, among the soft browns of the earth and in the deep green of the shadows, this uncouth shape sucks its bright scarlet from the ground along the edges of the receding snow. In shape and consistency it looks as if some ingenious Yankee had whittled it out of the red heart of a watermelon.

“Now let us take a swift flight down the Sierras, touching here and there to feast the eye on beauty. Leaving Shasta, we touch at Lassen Peak on the borders of Plumas. For long years seething hot springs have boiled and bubbled down his sloping

miles, ready to graduate into geysers. As I write, this peak has opened its craters in a series of beautiful explosions and eruptions. This spectacle, which may be of long or short duration, adds another entry in the calendar of wonders in the Far West."

Lake Tahoe is the most beautiful lake of California, and the poet has known it as man and boy these seventy years. One catches its meaning to him and realizes its influence over him in these paragraphs:

"Your eyes are still drinking the beauty of the road, when suddenly you are in the presence of Tahoe in her divinest hour; and she is blue, strangely blue, from rim to rim. Surely there is some mysterious dial that marks her moods of color. In her blue hour she has the uttermost azure known to earth. Not gem nor flower (not sapphire nor gentian) can match her tints and tones of azure.

"As you look and wonder, the sun sinks and the mountain walls that encircle the lake melt to roseate mist, then fade to lavender, then die to fawn that is edged with a wash of gold. And now the stars come thronging out, a star for every wave; and in your gliding boat you seem to hover in space between two starry immensities.

"We are a mile above the sea in midsummer, uplifted into a crystal air, an air purified by many waters and sifted through the forest balsams. Above us is the clear and sparkling heaven. It is a night

as young and ethereal as the first-born night in Eden—a night for beautiful memories, beautiful hopes—a night for sleep, for rest, for renewal.

"When the starry sky has been folded up in the splendor of a new morning, we are out skimming the lake in our boat again, watching the water change from emerald to indigo as we dart from depth to depth. All round us stand the mountains, from whose high precipices pour white torrents, 'Forever shattered and the same forever,' and down whose green ridges descend the forests to the rim of the water. Mount Tallac lifts its high front in the south, and on that summit the rose-pearl of summer lingers longest."

The Yosemite is the everlasting wonder of all souls, and it too has had its sublime influence on our poet, as his poetry will show. His prose description of the Yosemite is beautiful beyond even his poetry:

"And now we approach another Sierran wonder, the Yosemite Valley, one hundred and forty miles east of San Francisco and near the center of the sequoia groves, the center of the state. It is in the heart of the Yosemite National Park, a park that Muir calls 'A Godful wilderness.' It is, indeed, the chief treasure chamber of the Sierras, full of the colossi of woods and waters and full also of 'lovely smallnesses.'

"Here are memorials of the glacial plows—crag, gorges, cataracts. Here the lordly conifers of the

Sierras are gathered in splendid company, led by the unique and towering sequoia. Here also are the thousand Sierran flowers, terrace after terrace, all assembled in one fragrant and shining sisterhood.

“In the center of the park lies Yosemite Valley with its walls of sculptured granite, ‘aspered with foam of cascades,’ and rimmed with high Sierran cliffs. This is a deep gorge of grandeur, the adumbration of whose beauty in poem and picture has drawn the eyes of the world. It is in the spacious basin of the Merced River, and is seven miles long and nearly a mile wide; its walls soar a mile into the sky. Seen in its entirety, the deep gorge ‘looks like an immense hall or temple lighted from above.’ These are the mathematics under the grandeur, corresponding to the mathematics that are under the glorious sounds of a symphony. But at first the sense of the vastness may not rush upon you. Even flocks of birds swooping into the valley appear bewildered by the lofty walls; and, at first, they beat against them, again and again, before they learn to soar above the brim.

“Yosemite is one of the sublimities of the world, walled in like the secret city of the Lama, pillared more stupendously than Karnak, carved and heaved and heaped by cosmic powers that belittle the enginery that lifted the Pyramids into time, or that created the Coliseum at Rome.

“There is no great beauty unless it is touched with strangeness, with something that awes and



hushes the spirit. My friend wept when she first beheld the Parthenon—wept, she knew not why—not only at the ruined glory before her and the memory of the glory that had been, but also at the wonder of the greater glory above man, the wonder from which the miracle of marble had descended.

"And no man can stand before the majesty of Yosemite without feeling in some degree the divine emotion of sublimity, a sense of the unseen mystery of the world—without being stirred by a noble reverence for greatness, stirred perhaps to noble tears. Even the dim-seeing Indians felt that a mystic sanctity hung over this austere valley. It was a holy ground to them; they never entered the great canyon without first performing the rite of purification.

"To see Melrose aright, with her ruined abbey, you must see her by moonlight. Yosemite is also beautiful when her lofty cliffs and pinnacles are stilled and silvered by the moon.

"But perhaps there is a greater emotion for you, a more ethereal vision of loveliness when you survey the valley at sunset from Inspiration Point. Perhaps you have just reached the valley, coming in from Wawona, after hours of silent devotion among the giant sequoias not far down the trail. And now the valley lies before you, bathed in living lusters, its walls shining with a mystic fire that seems kindred to the sacramental light on the faces of the consecrated. There it lies with a floor like an Elysian meadow lit with gold, so serene, so ineffable,

that it might be the garden of the immortal amaranth and asphodel.

"This is the valley at sunset, yet it is beautiful also in the rosy light of dawn. As you descend into the great canyon, what burst of falling water is it that invites the eye and the ear? Behold, there are before you two waterfalls. On the right and on the left the Bridal Veil and the Ribbon Fall are forever weaving and unraveling upon the looms of the air. Here are two curtains of water held back to let you through—delicate bright water, but so massed and multiplied by the geometries of that leap through space that the impact seems like steel upon the floor below.

"And now, pushing on into the valley, El Capitán and the Cathedral Spires appear on either hand, propping the firmament—colossal cliffs of granite shaped out of the oldest substance at the core of the world. We might well pause here, for a mortal pen can give only a faint sense of the tranquil rapture, the turbulent glory, the divine dignity of Yosemite.

"Cathedral Spires soar nearly to the level of El Capitán, but their look is less unearthly. They recall the works of man—Giotto's unfinished Duomo at Florence, ruined perhaps like poor shell-torn Louvain—ruined, yet glorious in ruin. Confronting the Spires, El Capitán soars upward in one sheer flight of thirty-three hundred feet, impressing the soul with the sense of some final culmination, like

the Last Judgment. There he stands, imperious, imperishable, with the aspect of immortality, the gesture of omnipotence.

"Thus between sky-pouring waterfalls and ascending cliffs you pass into the heart of the valley. But, as we move among these forms of beauty and majesty, we get a keen delight, a moment of relief, as we look about and find on the valley floor our old familiar flowers and friendly trees. We are winding now along the Merced River, and on every hand we behold azaleas and wild roses, alders and poplars and willows. Perhaps as you enter heaven you will meet there also the old familiar flowers and trees to take the strangeness away—there where we learn to bear happiness, as here we must learn to bear sorrow.

"And, if you are in favor with the Spirit of the Valley, you may be permitted to behold an arch of rainbow splendor extending across the canyon from rim to rim. But it needs not this last flash of the hidden beauty to make the glory of your entry surpass the triumphal march of Babylonian conquerors.

"On, on we move into the grandeur. Dome and arch and waterfall and column, pavilion of trees and carillon of waters, greet us as we press onward, till at the far end we behold Cloud's Rest, soaring a mile high and closing the sublime vista, as a solemn chord of music might close an oratorio of creation.

"And now, when the great valley is hushed with

night, you stretch out for sleep in the pure, inspiring air; but with the dawn you are out again, studying the massive rocks, each one with his own individuality, and surveying the waterfalls which brighten the valley as the hearth-fire brightens the house. Perhaps you set forth on foot or on donkey to mount the long precipitous trail to the summit of Glacier Point, where you can see distant crags and peaks that are the sources of wild waters. Standing there on the famous jutting rock, you can drop a pebble three thousand feet before it touches the side of the precipice. And as you look down into the valley you seem to be gazing upon Lilliput, where the hotels are dwarfed into huts, where the river shrinks to a thread, where the lofty trees shorten into shrubs, where men lessen into moving points.

“From this o’erhanging summit in the sky you behold assembled cliffs and waterfalls in the northern end of the valley. The falls of Yosemite are the first spectacle to command the eye across the gorge. They pour through a gap in the wall that was plowed out by a glacier ages ago; there it took its Leviathan leap into the Yosemite to join the four other glaciers which were carving out the glory of the valley.

“These falls have well-nigh every wonder, every grace. Sometimes the whole of the long sheet of the descending water is lifted away from the precipice and blown to and fro by some mysterious wind. At



other intervals masses of water break away from the curving column at the lofty crest of the falls, rushing down in long streamers with snow-white heads and stretching meteor tails, swiftly disappearing into the spuming gulf below.

“When the Yosemite stream is full, the roar of the falls can be heard over all the valley as they make their threefold half-mile plunge into the abyss of beauty—a plunge as from Jungfrau’s icy cold to some sheltered vale in the Campania. The falls take three leaps, the first sixteen hundred feet and the last four hundred feet; and all the way down the long plunge we see rushes of perilous foam, shattered stars, ruined rainbows, crashing chryso-prase, billowing mist.

“But look again: a new rush of magnificence! A gust of wind disputes the water’s way, hurling, tossing, shattering and strewing the splendor in meteoric streams, ruined nebulae, bursting constellations. My wild heart drinks it in—the eternal motion and prismatic radiance, the eternal splendor of catastrophe. And I am shaken with another joy as I hear the far fulminating of the exploding waters crashing upon the triple ledges of the ancient rock.

“And now turn the eye from inconstant water to steadfast stone: Look upon the Half Dome lifting his summit toward the south—that enormous crag, that broken hemisphere of stone, uphurled nearly five thousand feet toward the clouds. But you must look upon this lofty and sculptured monolith some

time when he stands upon the brink of night, his base plunged in shadow and his lofty summit still shining with the glory of the sunken sun. Thus you will behold him in his greatness, behold him in his measureless calm, standing as the guardian of the valley, the last outpost of the vanished world of life."

And the sequoias, the oldest and largest living things on earth; hear his comrade hail to them:

"We have already walked and wondered in the hushed twilight of our mighty woods. But we have not looked yet upon the lordliest of all the trees. So, taking another flight (fifty miles) down the Sierras, we reach the region of the sequoias, those giant redwoods found only in California. They are the Titans of our forests—yes, the Titans of the forests of the world. Like gigantic, silent sentinels they stand through centuries.

"The sequoias are the oldest living things on the globe, the survivors of a widespread family or race of trees, which flourished back in the Miocene Era, before the Age of Ice. But they all perished in the Glacial Age, all except a few that survived perhaps in some sheltered canyon in the southern belt of California. It is believed that our northern sequoia groves stand on the broad ridges that were the first to throw off their ice-sheet at the old command, 'Let the dry land appear!' Certain ridges were cleared of ice while yet the canyons between them were cold with the glacial rivers; and it is thought that these cleared spaces were seeded by birds and

animals coming up from the south, from the region where we now find our broadest expanse of sequoias.

“They stand hushed and serene in the midst of lesser trees whose boughs tremble to every wind that blows. The immobility of the sequoias is as wonderful as their immensity. Yet the extreme tops of the trees wave in the wind; and impressive and sublime is the motion of their lofty branches. Their massive boughs, however, do not appear to sway; and whenever these ancients of the wood take counsel with one another in that upper air, no whisper of it drifts down to the listener on the ground. They appear to stand in eternal calm.

“Let us be reverent a little as we stand here in the hush of these leafy sanctuaries—be reverent a little, if reverence in this age is possible. These great trees belong to the silences and the millenniums. Many of them have seen more than a hundred of our human generations rise, and give out their little clamors and perish. They chide our pettiness, they rebuke our impiety. They seem, indeed, to be forms of immortality standing here among the transitory shapes of time.”

If the figures of speech taken from nature were removed from Markham’s poetry, that poetry would be and would look like a honeycomb with the sweetness drained away. The background of his forty years amid these wildernesses, these majestic trees and mountains, these valleys, tramping along these rivers, and over these trails, literally saturates and

drips like warm, sweet, May rains from his poetry; or plunges through much of it like the waterfalls of Yosemite; or lies blue and purple-deep in it, like the blue-deeps of Lake Tahoe. The white wonder of it lies like the white wonder of the fifty-six snow-clad peaks east of the Yosemite; lies over it like "The pity of the snow that hides all scars." The glow and the glory of California sunsets enshrine that poetry. The song of California birds sounds through it. The white of the Shasta daisy, and the gold of the California poppy blanket the fields of his verse. The dignity of California's stately cliffs, sequoias, and redwood trees sentinels it. The warmth of California's eternal sunshine permeates it. The deluge of its rains and the thunder of California storms flood it. Aye, even the colossal shudder and tumult of California earthquakes shakes the world through his social singing.

To catch a glimpse of how this background of nature has influenced the poet, read the opening stanza of his as yet unpublished poem "Sarpedon," written in memory of George Sterling, a fellow California poet:

"O poet of the Carmel promontories,  
With genius stormy as the stormy seas,  
The cliffs will miss you and the tortured trees,  
Twisted and stooped where the long torn shore is  
Tormented by the waves that never rest,  
Surges that seem on some eternal quest—  
Reminders of your passion and your grief.



Your high, strange song rusht like this billow-flight  
That swings from other lands, to break at night  
In splendor when long leagues of shore and reef  
Burst into terrible light."

Those who have known "Carmel promontories,"  
the cedars of Lebanon, those bent giants along the  
Monterey Coast, beaten down by Pacific storms,  
"the tortured trees," that strangely beautiful shore  
by Asilomar,

". . . this billow-flight  
That swings from other lands, to break at night"

—these need not be told of how nature has, in a  
sense, dominated this poet's universe.

Those who are familiar with the Pacific Coast and  
who know Mr. Markham's favorite poem, "Vir-  
gilia," with its tremendous quatrain, the like of  
which was never before written, will know:

"Forget it not till the crowns are crumbled  
And the swords of the kings are rent with rust—  
Forget it not till the hills lie humbled,  
And the springs of the seas run dust."

Those who have read further in that poem will  
understand that influence:

"What was I back in the world's first wonder?  
An elf-child found on an ocean reef,  
A sea-child nursed by the surge and thunder,  
And marked for the lyric grief.

"I mind me well how the waves' edge whitened  
As the shapes of the storm went whirling by—  
How I laughed and ran when the loud void lightened,  
And tempest shook the sky.

"So I will go down by the way of the willows,  
And whisper it out to the mother Sea,  
To the soft sweet shores and the long bright billows,  
The dream that cannot be.

"There will be held for the soul's great trouble  
Where the sea's heart sings to the listening ear,  
Where the high gray cliff in the pool hangs double,  
And the moon is misting the mere.

"'Twas down in the sea that your soul took fashion,  
O strange Love born of the white sea-wave!  
And only the sea and her lyric passion  
Can ease the wound you gave.

"I will go down to the wide wild places,  
Where the calm cliffs look on the shores around;  
I will rest in the power of their great grave faces  
And the gray hush of the ground.

"On a cliff's high head a gray gull clamors,  
But down at the base is the Devil's brew,  
And the swing of arms and the heave of hammers,  
And the white flood roaring through.

"There on the cliff is the sea-bird's tavern,  
And there with the wild things I'll find a home,  
Laugh with the lightning, shout with the cavern,  
Run with the feathering foam.

"I will climb down where the nests are hanging,  
And the young birds scream to the swinging deep,  
Where the rocks and the iron winds are clanging,  
And the long waves lift and leap.

"I will thread the shores to the cavern hollows,  
Where the edge of the wave runs white and thin;  
I will sing to the surge and the foam that follows  
When the dark tides thunder in.

“I will go out where the sea-birds travel,  
And mix my soul with the wind and sea;  
Let the green waves weave and the gray rains ravel,  
And the tides go over me.

“The sea is the mother of songs and sorrows,  
And out of her wonder our wild loves come;  
And so it will be through the long to-morrow,  
Till all our lips are dumb.

“She knows all sighs and she knows all sinning,  
And they whisper out in her breaking wave:  
She has known it all since the far beginning,  
Since the grief of that first grave.

“She shakes the heart with her stars and thunder  
And her soft low word when the winds are late;  
For the sea is Woman, the sea is Wonder—  
Her other name is Fate!

“There is daring and dream in her billows breaking—  
In the power of her beauty our griefs forget:  
She can ease the heart of the long, long aching,  
And bury old regret.

“Will you find rest as our ways dis sever?  
Will the gladness grow as the days increase?  
Howbeit I leave on your soul forever  
The word of the eternal peace.

“I will go the road and my song shall save me,  
Though grief may stay as the heart's old guest:  
I will finish the work that the strange God gave me,  
And then pass on to rest.

“I will go back to the great world-sorrow,  
To the millions bearing the double load—  
The fate of to-day and the fear of to-morrow:  
I will taste the dust of the road.

"I will go back to the pains and the pities  
That break the heart of the world with moan;  
I will forget in the grief of the cities  
The burden of my own.

"There in the world-grief my own grief humbles,  
My wild hour melts in the days to be,  
As the wild white foam of a river crumbles,  
Forgotten in the sea."

Markham uses his nature background to teach ethical and spiritual truths in poems such as "The Hidden Glacier," from *The Shoes of Happiness*, calling back the magic of memory to his need:

"There is no time for hate, O wasteful friend:  
Put hate away until the ages end.  
Have you an ancient wound? Forget the wrong. . . .  
Out in my West a forest loud with song  
Towers high and green over a field of snow,  
Over a glacier buried far below."

The beautiful tribute paid in "A Friend of the Fields," from *The Shoes of Happiness*, to another of his naturalist friends, John Burroughs, in a birthday greeting, would make even John Burroughs know that Edwin Markham lived through all his life on comrade terms with the nature that John Burroughs and John Muir loved:

"Old neighbor of the fields, 'Good day!'  
'Good morrow!' too, upon the way.  
Boon fellow of the forest folk,  
Close confidant of the reticent oak,  
Oh, be it long till your 'Good-by!'  
To friendships of the earth and sky.



“Go on with Life another mile,  
Lighting the way with kindly smile.  
Here is the Blue Jay with his brag,  
And here your friend, the faithful Crag;  
Here dwells your sister, the Bright Stream  
To sing her dream into your dream—  
All the meek things that love the ground,  
And live their days without a sound;  
All the shy tenantry that fill  
The hole and shelter of the hill;  
And all the bright quick things that fly  
Under the cavern of this sky.

“You find the friendships of the glen  
More constant than the oaths of men.  
Yet bear another while with towns,  
The push of crowds, the praise of clowns.  
Stay yet a little longer—stay  
To tell us what the blackbirds say;  
To hear the cricket wind his horn,  
And call back summer to the corn;  
To watch the dauntless butterfly  
Sail the green field, her nether sky;  
To hear, when mountain darkness falls,  
The owl’s word in his windy halls.

“Stay yet a little longer here  
To bind the yellow of the year,  
To hoard the beauty of the rose,  
To spread the gossip of the crows,  
To watch the wild geese shake the sedge,  
Or split the sky with moving wedge,  
To eavesdrop at the muskrat’s door  
For bulletins of weather lore,  
To tell us by what craft the bees  
Heap honey in communal trees,  
And by what sure theodolite  
They gage the angles of their flight.

"Still preach to us uncheerful men  
The sunny gospel of the wren;  
And tell us for another while  
Of Earth's serene, sustaining smile.  
Bear with us till you must be gone  
To walk with White and Audubon."

Among his most glowing short verses, with the nature background which he absorbed in his boyhood days, are "At Little Virgil's Window," from *Lincoln and Other Poems*:

"There are three green eggs in a small brown pocket,  
And the breeze will swing and the gale will rock it,  
'Till three little birds on the thin edge teeter,  
And our God be glad, and our world be sweeter!"

Or "Lost Lands," from this same book:

"I mind me once in boyhood when the mist  
Swirled round me, ash of pearl and amethyst,  
Now, in an unknown, difficult, high place,  
I pushed the green boughs backward from my face,  
And with a fire along the blood, a cry,  
Rode out along the headland in the sky."

From *The Shoes of Happiness* comes the first verse of "On the Suisun Hills"; lines in the first person, which, like those just quoted, show the dominance of that nature influence in his writing and in his life:

"Long, long ago I was a shepherd boy,  
My young heart touched with wonder and wild joy,  
Once in my happy country far away,  
One dear December day,

On green Sierran hills at fall of sun,  
 We shepherds came with singing, every one  
 Bearing a fragrant pack  
 Of manzanita boughs upon his back;  
 And soon the watch-fires kindled on the height  
 Where darting scarlet prongs against the night;  
 While all the huddled sheep  
 Were lying still, save one belated ewe  
 Bringing her lost lamb in with loud ado."

Comes "The Valley," memory from *The Man With the Hoe, and Other Poems*, to further show the influence of nature in the poet's life—comes in the first person out of a long memory:

"I know a valley in the summer hills,  
 Haunted by little winds and daffodils;  
 Faint footfalls and soft shadows pass at noon;  
     Noiseless, at night, the clouds assemble there;  
 And ghostly summits hang below the moon—  
     Dim visions lightly swung in silent air."

Comes "The Joy of the Hills," from that same volume with its lilting memory of boyhood days:

"I ride on the mountain tops, I ride;  
 I have found my life and am satisfied.  
 Onward I ride in the blowing oats,  
 Checking the field-lark's rippling notes—  
     Lightly I sweep  
     From steep to steep:  
 Over my head through the branches high  
 Come glimpses of a rushing sky;  
 The tall oats brush my horse's flanks;  
 Wild poppies crowd on the sunny banks;  
 A bee booms out of the scented grass;  
 A jay laughs with me as I pass.

"I ride on the hills, I forgive, I forget  
Life's hoard of regret—  
All the terror and pain  
Of the chafing chain.  
Grind on, O cities, grind:  
I leave you a blur behind.  
I am lifted elate—the skies expand:  
Here the world's heaped gold is a pile of sand.  
Let them weary and work in their narrow walls:  
I ride with the voices of waterfalls!

"I swing on as one in a dream—I swing  
Down the airy hollows, I shout, I sing!  
The world is gone like an empty word:  
My body's a bough in the wind, my heart a bird!"

Comes another nature memory in "Joy of the Morning," and "The Lamp," from *The Man With the Hoe, and Other Poems*:

"I hear you, little bird,  
Shouting aswing above the broken wall.  
Shout louder yet: no song can tell it all.  
Sing to my soul in the deep still wood:  
'Tis wonderful beyond the wildest word:  
I'd tell it too, if I could.

"Oft when the white, still dawn  
Lifted the skies and pushed the hills apart,  
I have felt it like a glory in my heart—  
(The world's mysterious stir)  
But had no throat like yours, my bird,  
Nor such a listener."

"Once, I remember, the world was young;  
The rills rejoiced with a silver tongue;  
The field-lark sat in the wheat and sang;  
The thrush's shout in the woodland rang;



The cliffs and the perilous sands afar  
 Were softened to mist by the morning star;  
 For Youth was with me (I know it now!)  
 And a light shone out from his wreathed brow.  
 He turned the fields to enchanted ground,  
 He touched the rains with a dreamy sound."

Nor has Edwin Markham ever pictured himself so graphically as he did in "The Elf Child," from *The Man With the Hoe, and Other Poems*:

"I am a child of the reef and the blowing spray,  
 And all my heart goes wildly to the sea.  
 I am a changeling: can you follow me  
 Through hill and hollow on the wind's dim way?  
 Yes, at the break of a tempestuous day  
 They bore me to the land through starless storm,  
 And laid me in the pillow sweetly warm  
 And broken by the first one's little stay.

"The elf kings found me on an ocean reef,  
 A lyric child of mystery and grief.  
 Then need I tell you why the trembling start—  
 Why in my song the sound of ocean dwells—  
 Why the quick gladness when the billow swells,  
 As though remembered voices called the heart?

From *Eighty Songs at Eighty* comes, even thus late in the poet's creative life, the echo of an old nature influence and memory in "The Divine Mother Remembered":

"In my mystical youth, I saw behind mountain and clod  
 A luminous something that looked like the Woman in  
 God.  
 Wherever I ran on the hills she was there at my side—  
 A spirit as chaste as a flower and as dear as a bride.

"It was you, O Mother, and you touched my lips with your wine,

And gave me the madness that makes of all beauty a shrine;

And you sent me a dream of the maiden God fashioned for me—

The sea-girl I followed of old in the spray of the sea—

The one I shall seek on all roads, as I hear her low calls—

The one I shall follow and follow till the last star falls.

"I stand on the cliff and look out on the wind-lifted wave,  
And it brings back the dreams that the touch of your mystery gave;

For you are the sea and her beauty, the sea and her song;  
And they send me a sense of the pathos of earth and her wrong.

It comes from the break of the billow, from the sob of the reef—

A sense of the tears and the struggle, and the infinite grief."

And in "The Curlew" from this the poet's latest volume there is a wistful nature note and background:

"Curlew, your voice so lost and lone  
Seems like an echo of my own.  
Your note has sounded on the sands,  
Down all the ages in all lands.  
Eternally your quavers die  
Into the ocean's ancient sigh.  
Like mine, O bird, your mournful strain  
Rises from life's mysterious pain.

"O lonely one, I know your grief  
That runs forever, reef to reef.  
Your plaintive minors by the sea  
Call to the dying dreams in me.

I am your brother, wistful bird,  
And in my song your cry is heard.  
For I too follow an unknown shore

“Where dim waves break forevermore:  
I also watch wild billows leap,  
But know not from what hidden deep.  
I too discern far out at sea  
Faint lands that seem to signal me.  
Like you I weave the hours that throng  
Into a web of wistful song.”

One of Edwin Markham's personal friends of a generation ago, Mr. B. O. Flower, of Boston, recognizing the tremendous influence of nature in the poet's formative period, wrote in this wise of those eventful and impregnating years:

“So, laden with his literary wealth, the future singer returned to the solitude of his mountain valleys and the companionship of his herds. It may be that the grandeur and simple dignity of nature had something to do toward stimulating in this youth a strong preference for those great men of genius whose imaginations soared into the Infinite and whose works stud with glory the darkness of the past.

“In his mountain home the youth held double converse. Nature, the mother of giants, and the geniuses of the past communed with the boy. Day by day under the shadow of the rocks or in the shade of the trees, with flowers blooming at his feet and the wind crooning in the branches overhead, he would turn with wistful eyes from the

mountains to his books. How in keeping with the emotions awakened by the grandeur of nature were the stately verse of Homer and the lofty dream of Milton! . . .

"As day by day the boy stood beneath the blue dome of heaven, walled in by rugged, age-scarred mountains and enthralled by the solemn, ceaseless roar of the distant waterfalls, or the mysterious whisperings of the pines as the wind caressed their graceful plumes and the sun called forth their incense tribute of rich, health-giving exhalations, while enveloped in the wonder and beauty of nature, whose aspects ever changed, but whose glory never lost its witching charm, little did the boy imagine that God himself was storing his youthful mind with treasures not gained in man-made schools.

"Time and again the boy lingered in the early morn, with face toward the east, enrapt by the transformation scene of dawn. The sentinel stars of the morning waned and disappeared, while a soft pink glow, delicate as the blush upon the opening blossom of the peach, suffused the east. And then, as by magic, the pink deepened into a warm red glow that lent new charm to rock and tree, while the soft haze that hid the distant mountains suddenly became a bridal veil, mantling the peaks that first greeted the day. And then the red was lost in the glory of light, and the sun's radiance lit up the western heights while yet the valley lay in shade.

"Sometimes at evening, when the herd was headed



for the corral and the distant tinkling of the leader's bell and the pounding of many hoofs on the rocky pathway came as an accompaniment to nature's subdued strains, young Markham was overmastered by the sea of glory that filled the western sky and witnessed anew to nature's delight in gorgeous colorings. Here, sometimes with flaming scarlet, sometimes with crimson, gold, orange, and lemon for a background, clouds rolled together in mighty billows, momentarily taking on new tints as luminous and multitudinous as were their shapes varied and suggestive. Sometimes royal purple predominated, and then beaten gold, with here and there a cloud that glistened with that dazzling whiteness which we associate with the robes of those whose purity of heart has admitted them into the audience chamber of the Eternal; and all the while the earth answered back to the glow of the sky. The red, the green, the gray, and the purple tints of rocks took on vivid hues that vied with the splendor of autumn; while the peaceful valley, where it had not come under the shadow of the rocks, was glorious in emerald and russet, and the mountain brook, so lately a ribbon of silver, now caught up and reflected the beauty of the sky, becoming a serpentine stream of molten gold. And there were nights such as are known only to those environed by nature in her majestic moods—nights when the stars refused to yield their glory to the moon, and the deep blue firmament was studded with diamond dust, while

below rose the sable, gloomy, and solemn Sierras, seamed and riven by the travail of nature, eloquent in their sphinx-like silence—age-long watchers gravely noting the rise and fall of races and the coming and going of generations.

“And so in this great university of nature, amid scenes where sublimity touched hands with beauty, the imagination of the boy was fed and his vision expanded. God spoke to the soul of the youth as surely as in olden times he spoke to the child Samuel, and, though the physical ear was not yet attuned to catch the vibrations of the Infinite, the spirit received the message with awe and wonder and pondered its lessons. The prophets of ancient Israel were no more truly prepared by God to deliver their message to the children of men than was this child of the Sierras, whose pure imagination was flooded by the wonderful wealth of lofty imagery and whose thought-world was tinged and colored by the beauty, simplicity, and dignity of nature.”

I bring to a close this chapter on the influence of nature in the life of our poet with a story of Edwin Markham's first visit to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. This for three reasons: first, because it illustrates a strange, sad fact in his poverty-ridden life, the fact that up to his seventy-fifth birthday, in spite of his love for nature, he had never felt that he could afford to take a pleasure trip to this wonderland; second, because it illustrates the magic truth

that even at the ripe age of seventy-five the poet had a soul that was still vibrant in its reactions to the great and Gothic wonders of this shrine; and third, because this experience with nature found the aging poet still happy, buoyant, and youthful in all of his reactions.

Surely, such an adventure belongs here; and surely such a week at seventy-five years of age will do much to reveal the reverent character and the ever-living and searching soul of the man.

It came about in this way: Mr. Markham was spending the month of May with me, and a friend said: "Has Mr. Markham ever seen the Grand Canyon?"

I knew that he had not and so stated. My friend replied immediately: "If he will go, I would be glad to take him as my guest."

Mr. Markham said: "I have never seen the Grand Canyon because I have never felt that I could afford that side trip for mere pleasure. It will be a fulfilled dream which I have long cherished."

We started out on Sunday evening in mid-May. As we all piled into our Santa Fé sleeping car Mr. Markham said to our host, Dr. B. B. Ralph: "This is the first real pleasure trip I can remember starting out on in all my life."

"Just what do you mean by that?" the Doctor asked him.

"I mean that I have never started out like this—just for fun—without having to work or lecture or

read my poems. I have never had a real pleasure trip like this in all of my seventy-five years of memories."

That night we got to talking about this poet's marvelous vigor and strength at seventy-five. He gave us his rules of health and happiness in the Pullman Smoker Open Forum, while a dozen men joined in the discussion.

"You are a pretty old man to be setting out to make a two-thousand-mile trip in ten days," said Doctor Ralph, with a smile, knowing his man, and knowing that his question would bring forth an answer worth while to all of us.

"You will find before this trip is over that I will stand it better than any of you, that I can walk as far, sleep as well, and that I will come back in better condition than any of you."

"Just how do you account for this unusual vigor and health at seventy-five?" the Doctor asked him.

"Some day I am going to write an article for some enterprising magazine on 'How to Be Alive at Seventy-five,'" responded the poet, with a hearty, contagious laugh that sounded above the rumble of the train.

Then he went on: "First, I think happy thoughts and I live in the realm of the ideal. Second, I never eat white bread. That is an abomination of the devil. I have not eaten white bread for a quarter of a century. I learned that lesson from my mother. She said to me, 'Edwin, never eat white bread if you



can get whole-wheat bread.’ When I first went to New York, I found it almost impossible to get whole-wheat bread, but in recent years the race has learned its lesson and we now have all the whole-wheat bread that we want. Third, I never lose a chance to take a drink of water. Fourth, I eat some fruit every day of my life, particularly at night, as I happen to be doing now.” The poet had a big bag of red apples on his lap and he was munching away as he delivered his lecture. Then he went on:

“My fifth rule of health is to get lots of sleep. If I go to bed at midnight I sleep until nine or ten. I believe in nine to ten hours of good, sound sleep. That will keep any man in good health.” I can testify that Mr. Markham can recover from the most vigorous day of lecturing and have the sparkle of youth, if he gets a good sound sleep of from eight to ten hours. I have seen him do it fifty times.

“My sixth rule of health is to eat very moderately, especially at the evening meal. My seventh rule is to eat red meat but once a day and do without that unless I crave it. Make vegetables do.”

Our first stop was in the Pan-Handle Oil Field of Texas, and here the poet had his first glimpse of a great oil field in operation. We landed in Pan-Handle itself and drove thirty miles across the prairie to Borger. It was a bumpy drive in an old car, but this seventy-five-year-old genius laughed at the bumps and sang all the way across the dusty expanse. About twilight we came to Borger, ate

our dinner in a typical boom-town restaurant, and then drove out to the fields.

It was like a Rembrandt picture—the lights flaring against the dark skies, weird figures moving about the drilling wells, huge trucks, loaded like freight cars, lurching about, up and down hill on unpaved roads.

We went immediately to a well that was in the process of drilling. The poet watched it with fascinated interest. "It's a regular Dante's Inferno. The whole weird expanse of gaunt derricks, gaunt men, moving about like shadow-shapes in the night, with the lights flaring against the skies and the roar of a Hindenburg line."

He referred to the terrific noise of the Casing-Head Gasoline Plants which roared away all night long within fifty feet of where we slept. These plants extract the gas that comes up with the oil, gas which was formerly wasted, and then pump it back into the wells so that it will help lift the oil again.

"This is poetry; the poetry of industry, human toil, and adventure. This is the Yukon all over again, and my friend Joaquin Miller went up to the Yukon to write poetry about it. But there is more real romance in this oil field than in the Yukon gold rush," said the poet.

From the Pan-Handle of Texas to the Painted Desert was a long jump, but we made it with the assistance of the Santa Fé Railroad. In two morn-

ings after leaving Amarillo we stopped at a little town in Arizona with about ten houses, all told, and started overland for the Painted Desert.

Mr. Markham was fascinated with this great pit of color and contour. He wanted to walk down the trail into the abyss. We could hardly get him away from the edge of this great, colorful hole in the earth.

"Why do you want to stay so near the edge, Mr. Markham?" I asked. I kept holding to his arm all the time. I was afraid he would fall.

"The eagle always likes the edge of an abyss," was his simple reply, to my anxiety.

After a few hours of the Painted Desert it was time to go. The automobile waited to take us through the Petrified Forest. But the poet did not want to leave.

"I want to stay here forever. This is beauty enough for one man's life. It is heaven and earth all rolled into one splendid painting of beauty and wonder. Let me stay."

But the hours were passing and finally we persuaded him to climb into the waiting machine, which headed off across the twenty-five miles of desert road for the Petrified Forest.

He was interested in every cactus tree that grew, in every animal, in every flower of the desert. He wanted to increase his vocabulary and took down words as fast as he learned them. He learned a whole new vocabulary in the oil fields, and asked

questions until he knew what a "bit" was, what a "string of tools" meant, what "spudding" signified, and a score of new words and ideas. He was the same with desert phraseology; he wanted to know every plant, and flower, and weed, and bird as we passed along. Fortunately, our driver was an old-timer and could give the poet the information he so passionately desired.

"To be eager to learn at seventy-five seems to me a marvelous thing," I said to him, as the machine lurched across the desert.

"I am more eager to learn at seventy-five than I was at twenty-five. We are just beginning to live at the three-quarter of a century mark. I shall live on to beyond a hundred—and then I shall go out to find real life and real living."

Soon, great petrified tree trunks began to appear; some isolated, and some in groups. They were all lying prostrate on the ground, having been swept in by some great tidal flood in the æons long since past and forgotten. These great trees did not grow where they are now lying. Mr. Markham soon learned that from the guide.

"This is the Playground of the Gods," said the poet, as we bumped through this great, vast, death-like valley of gaunt, gray skeletons of animals, and men, and trees. "Or, rather, it is the Graveyard of the Gods," he added as we saw the skeleton of a great tree lying in pieces across a dead, waterless river bed.



"Dante would have felt at home in this dead place. My own 'Ballad of a Gallows Bird' runs through a desert of dry bones like this graveyard," said Mr. Markham.

His figure was right. This great gray, sated, sapped, burned, blistered, dead desert was more suggestive of a cemetery than anything else. For fifty miles north and south and east and west it stretches across a waterless pit of fire and heat. The temperature was above a hundred the day we crossed this desert of dry bones. The great trunks of once living and gigantic trees were ghostlike in their prostrate helplessness. Most of them were crumbled and broken. Up near Cripple Creek, above Colorado Springs, I had seen great redwood trunks standing where they had grown millions of years ago, still erect, with petrified roots still clinging to the soil. This indicated that in ages long gone this great plateau was a tropical country which has since been lifted by some great upheaval until now it is a high mountain plateau.

When I told Mr. Markham of these great Colorado petrified redwood and sequoia tree stumps which are still standing, he said, "Perhaps these trees were washed down from the Colorado regions millions of years ago." He is just as likely to be right as anybody. It looks probable.

Then came the Grand Canyon.

I wanted to be standing beside the poet when he caught his first glimpse of this miraculous abyss

of beauty. We went from the train to the hotel in an automobile and the minute we stepped from the machine, before we even had time to register, he said: "Let me see the thing of beauty *now!* I want to see it *now.*"

We had tried to persuade him to wash the dust and dirt of the train from him before he walked over for his first glimpse of the canyon.

I took him by the hand and led him to the brink of the abyss. It was just at sunset and the minarets, domes, towers, cathedrals; the gigantic pyramid, the colosseum loomed like beautiful golden castles and temples. Red, gold, and rose tints predominated. I have seen the canyon three times, and I have never seen it when it seemed more beautiful to me.

The poet was wearing a big *sombrero* which some friend in the West had given him. He lifted it reverently from his white head. Then he bowed his head slightly as if in the mood of prayer. Then he looked up and out, as if looking for his immortal "Virgilia."

"His eyes peered out, intent and far,  
As looking beyond the things that are.  
He walked as one who is done with fear,  
Knowing at last that God is near.  
Only the half of him cobbled the shoes,  
The rest was away for the heavenly news.  
Indeed, so thin was the mystic screen  
That parted the unseen from the seen,  
You could not tell, from the cobbler's theme  
If his dream were truth or his truth were dream."

I asked him what he was looking at across the canyon.

He said, awe-struck and reverently, as if I were not present: "I am looking for Virgilia. She is coming there across the treetops."

Two things struck Mr. Markham, and he could not keep from talking about them while we were at the canyon. Hardly an hour passed that he did not ask if anybody had ever fallen over: "Surely, many people must fall over that awful abyss!" he would say, or, "I wonder if any children have ever fallen over the cliff?" If he asked this question once he asked it a hundred times.

"If Emmanuel Kant had seen this Grand Canyon, he would have changed his immortal phrase, 'Two things in the universe fill me with wonder, the starry heavens above and the moral law.' He would have said, 'The beauty of this Grand Canyon and the moral law within,' " said the poet.

His reverence was over for a minute. He had lived in the skies for a half hour. He forgot dinner and washing, and comfort. Then he came down to earth and said, "It is the only thing I have ever seen that comes up to the brag." And added: "It is the most colossal, the most sublimely beautiful, the most gorgeously ornate, the most soul-subduing spectacle on earth."

For several days we loafed and invited our souls. Mr. Markham's favorite view was that from Point Grandeur. I walked with him just after sunrise—

which was about five o'clock—for several miles along the rim, but no sight thrilled him as did that from Point Grandeur.

"This is heaven enough for me," he said one morning, after sitting for an hour at Point Grandeur. It was his only comment, and his only spoken word during that hour.

It was moonlight while we were at the canyon, and the poet liked to sit on the edge of the rim and watch the great shadows deep in the canyon. He insisted upon rising at four o'clock every morning so that he might see the sunrise. He was interested in the Hopi Indians and their dances; and a pair of cub bears which had just been captured on the desert fascinated him.

All during our visit the poet was taking down notes and jotting down phrases for a poem on the canyon. Some of the phrases caught the sublimity and beauty of the canyon in a single sentence. I said to him: "When will you write your Grand Canyon poem?"

"When it comes," he said, simply. And added: "I will wait for it as I waited for my Lincoln poem and my Hoe Man poem. It will come in good time."

And the world also will wait with great eagerness for that poem, for no man has ever written an interpretation of this great abyss of beauty who is half so well equipped to express it once and forever.

In our last look at the Grand Canyon Mr. Markham turned to me and said: "I do not know why I



want to tell you, just at this minute, what my favorite lines of poetry are, but I do. This beauty brings them to my mind.

“What are they?” I asked, encouraging him.  
For answer he quoted these lovely lines:

“There’s the wise Thrush,  
He sings each song twice over  
Lest you should think he never could recapture  
That first fine careless rapture.”

### CHAPTER III

#### "FROM THE GREAT OF OLD"

##### SOMETHING OF THE PLACE OF BOOKS IN THE POET'S LIFE

"He read to us from the great of old,  
From the shining poet clan,  
Who bring again the Age of Gold,  
When youth and wonder ran."<sup>1</sup>

**I**T is late October in New England. A Baltimore oriole's nest, on its slender support, hangs swaying in the winds just outside my study window. Crimson maple leaves are fluttering to the ground in a fitful fall wind. A lingering bluebird swings across an open space between trees, with a "Song like the pathos of falling leaves set to music," which is the way another poet, Bishop William A. Quayle, puts it, describing just such a scene as Edwin Markham and I look upon from our vantage point.

"The pathos of falling leaves set to music" the poet murmurs, as we sit silently watching the autumn evening fade to crimson, gold, opal, and finally to purple majesty. Then the evening star plunges into the twilight purple.

We are both subdued to silence; that silence be-

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<sup>1</sup>"The Enchanter," from *Eighty Songs at Eighty*.

ing broken finally by Mr. Markham, after a long interval of hushed hearts, with these worldly words: “To-morrow I want you to take me to Goodspeed’s bookstore. I never leave Boston without a visit to that institution.”

We had been talking about books a half hour before that glowing sunset arrested our eyes and our hearts and invoked our silence. Night had set in and we had come back to our conversation in subdued tones—back to our talk about books and life; about books in his long and eventful life of the mind and the spirit.

Those first words of his after the long silence were characteristic of the poet.

Books to him are as sacred as the most beautiful things that nature offers. For fifteen years I have tramped the streets of five great American cities with the poet, hunting and haunting second-hand book stores. He is known to second-hand book store owners all over this nation, from San Francisco to Boston. I verily believe that he spends a third of his leisure hours and half of his income in the narrow, dusty, book-crowded aisles and corridors of such nooks. If you wish to find Mr. Markham, when you know that he is actually inhabiting any certain city, you will be sure to find him in some second-hand book shop. When he comes to pay me a visit, he always buys and sends home from a dozen to fifty books. When we go into a book shop they all know him and his wishes. He knows books so

intimately that he buys intelligently. The bookmen know this. He is always on the search for certain great books. He seldom reads a book that was written less than fifty years ago. He is not enamored of modern books. He has his opinions of them and those opinions are not always complimentary. He lives in and with the classics.

His habit is to buy his books and then have them tied around with string and set aside for him. He may not get them for weeks, but the bookmen always keep them for him. It is a joy to watch him browse among old books. Very soon the bookman whispers to his customers that the author of "The Man with the Hoe" is in his shop, and the curious visitors watch every move, much to the delight of the proprietor, and the poet; for he is not without his little vanities, in spite of his deep humility. Usually a crowd gathers and furtively watches the poet as he caresses and fondles books. He likes beautiful bindings, and while he has never had money to collect first editions and expensive books, nevertheless he loves them with a devotion that is beautiful to see. He runs his hands over books as some men pet children. He likes the feel of a book; the older the better.

Every time he visits me in my home we go through a ritual in my own library. He boisterously and industriously goes through my library and pulls out the books he wants me to give him. The process is for him to pull out and turn "end-to" all that



he wants. Then I go through them, and if I can spare them, we wrap them up in little piles with string around them. He puts his name in his own writing on them in this sentence: "These are the Poet's."

When his visit is finished, I make a further sifting. I tell him: "You steal my books and then I steal them back from you," and he laughs aloud like a big boy caught in mischief.

But when he has gone home I always wrap up a dozen or so and mail them to him. This has been going on for twelve years, and it has been a beautiful game between us. There is little that I have been able to do for the poet, but this has been a joy to me. His hunger for books is like the hunger of a seeking soul. It is gorgeous to watch. Even at eighty years of age the old and growing hunger for knowledge is deep in the roots of his being, flowering, as the years go by, into a tree of knowledge reaching to the horizons of his life.

No man can live intimately with Edwin Markham and not soon come to know that he not only lives with and for books, but that he reads and knows them from cover to cover. He reads with a passion that few men possess. He is familiar with the field of science, philosophy, poetry, history, and drama. Few men read as widely or as penetratingly as he. He spends much of his time at home in his library reading.

One would wonder why he always reaches out so

eagerly for more books. I asked him why one day and he said, "Because I want to live some more!"

One would also wonder where he is going to store these additional books which he gathers up everywhere he goes. When I send him out to speak for my theological students, he always comes back with a book or two to add to his already overflowing library.

I should say "libraries," rather, for every room in his home on Staten Island is a library. Visitors to that charming place will find books piled to the walls in every room. The stairway to the upper floor is piled three feet deep with books on the railing side, so that one has to walk through rows of books up those stairways to reach the second floor. The dining-room table is also piled high with books.

When one is called to dinner, the books on the dining table are pushed back just far enough for Mrs. Markham, the poet, and the visitor to have places for plates—and not one inch farther. Books have the right of way in that household, and no chance visitor is permitted to usurp their place. One looks up over the tops of books, as he eats, into the smiling faces of his host and hostess; and the poet will reach out and say: "Here is one of the Immortals, my son," and will read a few passages in between courses. It is a glorious experience to eat between piles of books hoary with age and truth.

Mr. Markham absorbs books as a sponge absorbs

water, as a desert absorbs a shower. Never has he come to my home but that our first task upon his arrival has been to pack and mail the books which he absorbs from libraries visited en route to my home. We send immediately the books which he has collected up to the day of his arrival, because we know that there will be plenty to wrap up and mail after he has been with me for a month.

On one of his recent visits I wrote Mrs. Markham a letter, introducing it by saying, "While I am writing to you the poet is looting my library, as usual."

And he not only buys and collects books; he reads and digests them. I once said to him: "Now, don't you try to fool me. You don't read all of these books, with all the writing you have to do!"

Half indignantly he shot back at me: "Young Mister-know-it-all, you are mistaken! I know what is between the covers of every one of the twelve thousand books I have in my library!"

And I believe him. I have never seen a man who could sit down and give the contents of a book which he has just read as quickly, as clearly, and as thoroughly as he can. It is an education in itself to talk with him about books. In this respect he is like the late Theodore Roosevelt. He reads swiftly, but accurately. He absorbs the contents of a book as he absorbs the physical books themselves.

As we sat in my library on that late October afternoon, described in the opening words of this chapter, I had asked the poet to tell me the ten great

books which have most influenced his life, and for the entire evening, following that glorious autumn sunset, he sat and went over them, giving me a swift survey of the contents of each of these great epoch-making books.

I said to him: "I want you to tell me of the ten great books in your life; the books which have influenced you most. I want you to pick them out in the order in which they have influenced you. I want you to imagine that you are to be marooned on a desert island in mid-sea. If you were, I want to know the books you would like to have along to comfort your soul and mind for a year. Think of them in the order in which you would select them. For instance, if you could have but one book, what book would it be? Then if you could have but two books, what would they be? Then, if you were permitted to select a third book, what would it be; and so on to the end."

This poet, whose pockets and brief cases are always bulging with books; who reads them walking along streets, on street cars and trains; who goes to bed with them and falls asleep over their pages, liked my idea and started in for an unforgettable two-hours' talk, in somewhat the following brief, almost telegraphic fashion, as is sometimes his way when he is impassioned and feels that the time is going to be too short for him to say all that the overflow of his mind wants to express:

"Peter Parley's *History of the World* was my first



book when I was about eight years old in California. He was a book writer for children in those early days, and his books went into millions of little hands and hearts.

"In my boyhood home we had only the Bible, the story of the Pyramids and its relation to Scriptures, and a copy of the Almanac. We were poor people and our library was small. Perhaps that accounts for my insatiable book-hunger since those days.

"If I had to pick ten books to take to a desert island to cheer my heart most, and give me spiritual strength for the way, I would take first of all the Gospels of Jesus. Then I would take as my second treasure, *Amiel's Journal*, because it was written by a powerful genius, recording in reasoned and seasoned paragraphs the history of his soul in contact with the vast mystery of existence.

"Shakespeare's dramas would go into my bag next, because he was the greatest poet of all times, the man who stands at the intellectual summit of the world.

"Then would come *The Selected Poems of Robert Browning*, because—after Shakespeare—he is the greatest thinker in the realm of poetry.

"The poems of John Milton would come next, because he stands pre-eminent as the man who could rise at times to the level of the sublime and maintain himself in that exalted atmosphere—the place where man touches eternity and God.

"William James' *The Will to Believe* would have the next place, because he flings all foggy metaphysics and theology aside, and approaches the difficult and anxious questions of the soul from the viewpoint of the man in the street.

*A Study of Religion*, by James Martineau, would go into my library, because in the modern world he is perhaps the keenest intelligence that ever touched the great mystery of religion.

"Then *Evolution in Its Relation to Religious Thought*, by Joseph Le Conte, would be selected because it sets forth all that is important in the doctrine of evolution and gives us a luminous and exalted vision of the religious verities.

"*Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, by Henry Drummond, would be next because it was the first great book to show that what is worth while in religion has foundations upon the eternal logical life.

"Then would come *Heaven and Hell*, by Emmanuel Swedenborg, because he was the first great thinker to make it plain that the next life is only an evolution of this life and that the spiritual world is based upon common sense.

"Next in importance on my desert-island shelf of books would come *The Arcana of Christianity*, by Thomas Lake Harris, because it sets forth the remarkably idealistic philosophy of the occult aspects of Christianity.

"Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and *The Man Who*

*Laughs* would find a place, because they are entertaining romances; and because they throw light upon the social destiny of man.

"*The Words of a Believer*, by Félicité Robert de Lamennais, would complete the list, because it contains poems and prose, giving picturesque and powerful appeals to strong men and women to come forth for the social salvation of the race."

I wanted to keep the poet down to a selection of ten books and ten authors for this desert-island library, but found it impossible to do. However, he did concede that he would stop at thirteen, allowing for three of Hugo's great novels, Shakespeare's dramas, and the Gospels of Jesus as extra measure. With these he could live eternally and be satisfied.

In other chapters I speak of the great books that gave the poet his social vision, and of the dramatic story of the first group of books that he earned and had his mother purchase for him in San Francisco; of the abandoned library of an Episcopalian rector which he found in an old hay loft in California; of the place that books had in the awakening of the poet in his soul. But here I confine myself to a brief summary of the place that books, in general, have had in his life, and to a setting down of the thirteen great books which have dominated his life, like a Canadian Rocky Mountain range with thirteen great jutting peaks lifting themselves in silhouette against a crimson sunset. As he looks back through his long life and in these vesper years

estimates what they have meant to him, and notes how their huge bulks rise against the evening light of his years, he sees these books like mountain peaks in their proper perspective.

I have a certainty that when a man looks back from eighty he will make a fairly accurate estimate of the great books of his life and what they have meant to his thinking and to his pleasure.

The evening is drawing to a close. The autumn air becomes crisp and chilly. I close the library study door. The stars have marshaled a host across the skies; for hours have passed since the evening star first shone in the purpling west. The poet begins to stir restlessly as if he wants to be moving along. Suddenly I catch him on the wing with this final question:

"But, Poet, what will it all mean? What will you do with all your books and their contents when you go out into that western world we saw this evening at sunset from these windows? Where shall we find you then?" His answer came like a flash of assurance.

"You'll find me browsing around in the libraries of the Spiritual Universe. And there'll be plenty of them over there too."

It will be noted that in this conversation about the place of books in his life the poet starts off with Peter Parley's *History of the World*. This was his first reading. In that little cabin home in the Suisun Hills he sat at his mother's knees and heard



these stories before he was able to read them himself. During these developing years great books were forming his boyhood thoughts. The vistas which open through great books were swinging wide to him five years before "The Enchanter" in the form of Harry G. Hill came into his life and introduced him to the great poets. That was when the boy Markham was thirteen years of age. For five years preceding that quickening hour he had been living in the great prose volumes available to him at that time, his boy-mind growing through constant contact with nature as he tended his mother's sheep, and through constant contact with the great minds of earth as he read the classics by night. That boy-mind was curiously and wonderfully ready for the coming of the new birth into the world of poetry; ready for "The Enchanter," who quickened and awakened his own creative spirit.

## CHAPTER IV

### "A SORCERER OF SONG"

#### SOMETHING OF THE GROWTH OF POETRY IN HIS LIFE

"It was far in the West by a lonely road,  
Dusty and gray and long,  
When suddenly into the schoolhouse strode  
A Sorcerer of Song."

SOME scientist has recently said that he can examine the water at the mouth of a river and tell what kind of land it flowed through, and what its source has been. Within the expansive delta of a Mississippi or a Nile the scientist can analyze the soil and silt to reconstruct the strange story of its life and existence.

In that same sense we can study the poetry of Edwin Markham and learn a great deal about the land through which this life has flowed; something of the spiritual development; something of the problems of that life; something of its history. We can also learn a good deal of the larger world in which the poet has lived, because Edwin Markham's poetry is universal in its scope. But, fortunately for us, we not only have his poetry but we also have the man himself, still alert at eighty years of age, with a

clear mind, a comrade heart, and a spirit friendly to such research.

In this particular chapter we have the double advantage of tracing through his life the stream of pure poetry through its meandering ways, back to its source, not only through one of his own great poems, but also through his own memories. One could hardly claim to know the heart of a great poet without having studied the contents of that poetry at its full flowing plunge into the sea of life, even as the scientist studies the soil of a river at its delta. But when we can buttress that study of the poetry itself with the story of the growth of poetry in his soul, as told by the poet himself, we are doubly fortunate.

A shepherd boy, like Poet David of old, young Edwin Markham tended his mother's sheep and cattle on the hills of California. It was there, walking beside his herds, sitting quietly in the shade of a tree, lying on the green grass, watching the eagles in tall crags, his cheeks kissed by the early morning sun; finding shelter in the lee of some jutting cliff, that Edwin Markham drank into his boy heart the great dreams, figures of speech, the tang of earth, "The smack and smell of elemental things," the sweep of sky, the wonder and mystery of life, which later crept and swept into his poetry.

But behind all of this influence of nature we must not forget that poet-mother, the woman who, though Spartan in her business dealings, was at the same

time the woman who recorded all great events in poetry—"the arrival of ships, the flight of strange birds." Therefore, when we think in terms of this boy's awakening consciousness to the meaning of poetry in the soul, this woman still stands in the background "keeping watch above *her* own," waiting, dreaming, eager to see in her son that which was denied her in any great way, but gleamings of which she certainly understood—the joy of writing creative poetry.

The soul of that boy was, therefore, ready for a great event in his life, perhaps the greatest event in all of his life. That event had its setting in a little country schoolhouse, for one day there stepped into that schoolhouse a man whom the poet has chosen to call "The Enchanter," or "A Sorcerer of Song," in the form of a tall, gaunt-faced, Lincoln-like, friendly teacher named Harry G. Hill.

It was this teacher, as many another teacher before him and since has done for young souls, who introduced him to the poets, and opened a new earth and sky and sea to his imagination. The young boy's soul was unconsciously ready for the coming of this dreamer across the horizons. His spirit was ripe for that awakening, for that quickening. Nature had prepared him already. The beauty that he saw about him by dawn and noon and starlit night had already done something to his boy-spirit. He had already been saturated with the dripping glory of earth and sky. The soil of his soul had been



plowed and harrowed by hardship and beauty. That soul was ready to have dropped into it the seed of poetry.

For years the poet has talked with reverence of that immortal day when the country school-teacher walked into the single-roomed school. He has talked of that man and of that day in hushed tones, and with strangely lighted eyes. He has always said that some good day he desired to immortalize that man and that hour in a poem. Through half a century the idea of that poem has been brewing in his mind and heart. Over and over has he talked of that great spirit who awakened his boy-mind to the presence of poets in the earth, and to the beauty of their great utterances.

Then came *Eighty Songs at Eighty*, and in that book the beautiful thing was done. We found it on page seventy-three with the poet's simple statement:

"This poem is a reminiscence of my early school-days in California when I went to an old redwood schoolhouse, where for three months I came under the magic spell of The Enchanter, Harry G. Hill, a teacher who loved great poetry and who taught me to love it also. Thus I came to know Tennyson and Bryant, to whom I refer in the poem. This teacher, this beloved teacher, left an indelible mark upon my life. Joy and victory attend him on the long roads ahead!"

One can never understand the birth of poetry

in the life of the boy or the man until he sees in all of its beautiful significance that high and holy hour up there in the Suisun Hills of California. Mr. Markham's own memory goes back with glorified reverence to that sunny day when something great and good happened to his boy-soul.

"I see the school with its one stark room  
Scribbled with weather-stains,  
Where a captive bee with a ceaseless boom  
Pounded the window-panes.

"The rusty stove, from a zigzag crack,  
Spewed ashes on the floor;  
While the droning clock on the wall far back  
Notched off the Evermore.

. . . . .

Then came the great hour, as the poet himself describes it:

"It was far in the west by a lonely road,  
Dusty and gray and long,  
When suddenly into the schoolhouse strode  
A Sorcerer of Song.

"He opened to us the lyric doors  
Of the deeper world that waits,  
Throbbing behind our skies and shores,  
Pulsing through lives and fates.

To this eager boy that day the new teacher read from Tennyson, from Bryant, and Moore:

"And as the vibrant verses flew  
Impassioned from his tongue,  
He seemed to change; his sad face grew  
Mysteriously young."

Then the poet tells in "The Enchanter" of how this old teacher led the children out into the fields and woods, pointed out the birds, and trees and clouds to them:

"Sometimes he led the children out  
To hill or woodland wild:  
We followed him with joyous shout—  
He too a happy child.

. . . . .

"And when he was too stirred to speak,  
He turned a wistful eye  
As if instinctively to seek  
Some signal from the sky."

Harry G. Hill was a mystic, and he made a mystic out of that young shepherd of the hills:

"Sometimes he paused as if he heard  
Strange music in the air—  
As if some Vision of the Word  
Hung a bright moment there.

"Was he some pilgrim from the prime,  
Tuned to life's deeper themes?  
Had he descended into time  
Through some long night of dreams?"

Then suddenly one day, as mysteriously as he had come, this "Sorcerer of Song" vanished from the life of the boy Markham; three months at most he had remained; a wanderer such as California knew in those days; those strange, adventuring days so shortly after the gold rush; vanished, as the poet says, "into thin air."

"He passed beyond our mortal reach,  
Beyond the peaks afar;  
Yet by his magic left on each  
The tincture of some star."

Whatever he may have done to the others in that little group of school children, perhaps fifteen in all, he certainly left "The tincture of some star" on this growing, awakening boy.

And to-day that boy, grown into one of the great of the earth, wonders in what spiritual valley and on what high, unearthly peak "The Enchanter" now walks:

"I wonder now what place he fills  
In what high-heart romance:  
I'm sure he's on melodious hills  
And where the children dance.

"And when God passes, he must pause  
And hark with deep regard  
To hear him plead the poet's cause;  
For God, too, is a bard."

We hear tall talk about "The golden age of Greece." These also were the days of gold in California; aye, even in these very Suisun Hills; for it was at the foot of those hills, in the Sacramento Valley, that gold was first discovered. Then the search for gold crept up into these hills, and beyond, into the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Even as late as 1865, when the boy Markham was thirteen years of age, wandering adventurers searched for gold in the streams about his home. He knew of these adventurers, when he saw them wandering by as he sat



on the hillsides tending his sheep, or as he sat in the old schoolhouse looking out across the horizons. Indeed, as we have seen, he found a cache of golden coins one day. But the age of gold for the boy Markham was the quickening and awakening of his soul to the music of the earth when Harry G. Hill passed by.

Sixty-five years after that spring day which marked the soul awakening of that California boy, I sat with the poet and talked with him into the long gray hours of dawn, around his own hearth fire on Staten Island, about Harry G. Hill and about the stream of books and poetry which through all these years has been flowing through the valley of his eventful life.

It seemed worth while to find out how this love for poetry had been born, and how it had grown through the years. It seemed good to discover what had made it possible for him to give to the world "Lincoln, the Man of the People," "The Man With the Hoe," "The Ballad of the Gallows Bird," and to know the long story which was back of the poem called "The Enchanter." I knew that there must have been certain influences at work. I guessed that they might possibly be books and men.

The gray-haired poet looked up from the fire and said, quietly: "When I was nine years old I was tending sheep on the Suisun Hills of California where my mother owned a ranch. At nights after I had herded the sheep all day I would come

home and read books. I could hardly wait to get home to those books. I was book-conscious as far back as nine years of age.

"Nine miles away from our town there was an editor of a county newspaper whose name was C. B. Powers, and his paper was the *Salano Republican*. I met him in the county seat and he said to me one day: 'Boy, I notice that you like to read. Whenever you come to town come and see me, and I'll give you something to read.'"

"In those early days in California every country newspaper received *The Eclectic Magazine*, *Little's Living Age*, and other magazines that were being published, all of which put together would not equal a single issue of one typical magazine as published to-day. But that editor would lay aside for me exchange newspapers, magazines, and now and then a current book, and in that way I came in contact with the living world. Usually I carried down a basket of vegetables in exchange for my papers and magazines. The great editor received the vegetables, thankfully, carried them home, and ate them at his leisure as I read his books and magazines at my leisure—and I had plenty of it in those days.

"My next contact with the world of books came when I met Harry G. Hill, who came to the old Redwood School to teach. In those days we had three months of school each year. A man would appear, teach three months; then disappear, never to be seen again in those parts."

It was in the fall of Edwin Markham's thirteenth year that Harry G. Hill hovered over the horizon of the Sierra Mountains, walked down the trail wearing a dusty alpaca coat, and strode into the little mountain schoolhouse.

One noon during the lunch hour this school-teacher got to talking with this shy and reticent lad. That day the boy talked of things his eyes had seen as he tended his mother's sheep; of dawns and twilights, of fog, and mist, and storm, and earthquake; of mating birds and cloud-bursts, of the smell of the warm earth, of pine trees and glacial meadows—and Harry G. Hill listened with eagerness and wistfulness. He was always looking for the unusual in personality. That noon he said to young Edwin Markham: "You have a love for the beautiful in you, my boy. You have caught the far-off echo of beauty; you have a poet's insight."

This boy, this mountain shepherd, did not know of what his teacher spoke, for he had never heard of poets. He had never up to that time been familiar, save as immortal names, with Tennyson, Moore, Bryant, Poe. In his mountain country nobody owned a copy of any of these poets. So the mountain school-teacher sat on a log on a summer day and quoted poetry to young Markham. Something strange and beautiful happened to the soul of this boy on that midsummer day in front of the old schoolhouse as this Mark Hopkins sat on a log with his pupil. Markham describes it:

"When I first heard those words set to music like the falling leaves of an autumn day or the fluttering feather from a bird's wings, a strange excitement flooded my soul, like dawn sweeping over our mountains. I asked for more, and there was more where that came from, for Harry G. Hill was literally overflowing with memorized poetry, and in me he found an eager listener. The lyric fire of that poetry kindled my soul. It was as though the gates of Paradise had opened and I had found my way inside. It swept through me like some madness."

"Then," continued Mr. Markham, "he introduced me to Bryant's 'Thanatopsis,' which I committed to memory:

'To him who in the love of nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms  
She speaks a various language' " . . .

Mr. Markham quoted every line of that beautiful poem with a relish, a swift swing of word and thought, a facial expression, which re-enacted that great moment of boyhood when the school-teacher was in the process of baptizing his soul in the white waters of poetry.

"Then he told me about a man named Tennyson and urged me to commit the lyric lines of 'Tears, Idle Tears.' I thought them to be the most beautiful things my ears had ever heard, sweeter than the music of the wind in the great redwood trees



which surrounded us. They acted like some celestial wine upon my spirit. These lines sang their way into my inner brain. It was like a religious awakening to me. They murmured in my heart. It was after a month of this contact with my new teacher that I went home one evening and told my mother that I must have—I had to have—four books: a copy of Tom Moore's poetry, Bryant's poems, Tennyson, and an unabridged dictionary so that I could look up all the hard words.

"Where did you think you would get them, boy?" my mother parried, in her cautious, canny way.

"You'll buy them for me!" I declared.

"But mother couldn't see it that way.

"Behold me! A would-be student of the poets, in utter despair! Mr. Hill had written a number of poems down for me, and these I recited and read over and over again. But they didn't begin to satisfy my appetite. I was a-thirst for more beauty. Again I went to my mother.

"I must have the books," I said. "Please lend me the horses and the plow, and I'll find a farmer who'll let me plow for money to buy them."

His Spartan mother agreed to this method of securing the books, and a friendly farmer generously gave the boy a twenty-dollar gold piece for plowing twenty acres of land, and the mother on her next trip to San Francisco bought the eagerly anticipated books and brought them home.

It is of such rich memories as these that he writes

in his tribute to that school-teacher in the Suisun Hills, who awakened his boy-mind to the presence of poets and poetry in the earth. No single detail of that awakening is missing from his memory.

Mr. Markham still remembers and can quote in full the poems which he learned that thirteenth year of his life, and he marks that high and holy moment as the time of his birth into the musical mysteries of the Muse. Here, for the first time, he caught the sense of rime and rhythm. One wonders if on that Far Shore that humble country school-teacher knows that he was the awakener of one of the world's great poets.

But another book adventure was coming to this young Markham boy. With wonder-lighted memory Mr. Markham, in these late years, tells us how he received this "Manna from Heaven":

"Six months after I began to build this library I found an old corner cupboard in a house that had been abandoned. There in that old cupboard, buried in dust and cobwebs, I found a copy of Byron, of Pope's translation of the 'Iliad,' Walter Scott's *The Tales of a Grandfather*, and a large calf-bound copy of Byron's complete poems and letters. Here was a treasure for me.

"I read those stories in Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* until I was an expert in Scottish history. Next I turned to Byron. He seized upon my imagination, which Tennyson had already awakened, but Byron I found suited my young mind best. His

poetry was largely objective, dealing with outward events expressed in a free, swinging style, so necessary to the young mind.

"And now," cried the poet, "in reading Byron I had a new experience. I was tossed as upon a vast, mysterious sea; was swept away, lifted far beyond myself, voyaging upon his marvelous ocean of resounding words. With what avidity I read 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' 'Darkness,' 'The Ocean,' 'The Destruction of Sennacherib,' 'When We Two Parted.' How many times I read 'The Dream,' that poem which tells of Byron's impassioned but tragic affection for Mary Chaworth! It invoked in me visions of loveliness, and laid a strange enchantment upon all my romantic boyhood. I was greatly fascinated by his *Cain* and *Manfred*, two dramas that dealt with the tragic and mysterious side of existence. I was charmed by the surge and thunder of his 'Apostrophe to the Sea.' " Here the poet quoted from childhood memory, a memory running back more than sixty-five years:

"Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean, roll!  
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;  
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control  
 Stops with the shore; upon the watery plain  
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain  
 A shadow of man's ravage, . . ."

"Thus, out of Byron I sprang as a stream from its fountain source. Under his inspiration I began to write. My first poem, I remember, was called

'A Dream of Chaos.' It could hardly have amounted to much. No matter! I was now under full sail, writing continually, filling small notebooks with hundreds of poems and words and phrases that sang for my boyish ear.

"These great poets stirred something within me. Not long after I learned to know what poetry was, I began to write it myself. I was awakened by a consciousness of the existence of poetry at thirteen, began to love it by fourteen, and started to write at fifteen."

To-day Edwin Markham is writing the greatest poetry of his life. His creative genius seems to have blossomed into its full flower late in life. Critics are calling *Eighty Songs at Eighty*, his most recent book, the best work he has done. "Our Israfel," a poem written in memory of Edgar Allan Poe, contains the most lyrical lines of his creative life. This poem was contributed to a Poe Poetry Contest, organized by *The Poetry Review* in 1924. Two hundred poems were submitted by writers from many nations. The judges were Alfred Noyes and five leading editors. Mr. Markham's poem won the prize. It will be published in his *Collected Poems*.

As we look back to that redwood schoolhouse in The Suisun Hills, and see "The Enchanter" pass by, and then turn to "Our Israfel," we seem to see the full-flowing stream of the place of poetry in Markham's life; see its flow from its source to its beautiful broad emptying into the sea of life, of world



literature, of world-dream. Somehow the lines which Markham has written in tribute to Poe seem to sum up his own spirit:

"The sad great gifts the austere Muses bring—  
Breathing on poets the immortal breath—  
Were laid on him that he might darkly sing  
Of Beauty, Love, and Death.

"They laid upon him dreams of high romance,  
A hunger for a loveliness more strange  
Than earth can give in all her piteous chance,  
In all her changeless change.

"They sent him dreams of beauty's starrier birth,  
Dreams of a beauty touched with tragic grief—  
A wilder beauty than is known to earth,  
Where beauty is so brief.

"They laid upon him music's trembling charm,  
The mystery of sound, of shaken air,  
Whose touch can still the spirit or alarm—  
Build rapture, build despair.

"They struck him with imagination's rod,  
The power that built these heavens that soar and  
seem . . .  
These heavens that are the daring of some God  
Stirred by the lyric dream."

And somehow to us that "they" of Markham's  
"Israfel" changes to "He" who was the wandering  
"Enchanter."

"And so they called the poet into Time,  
The saddest and the proudest of the race  
That ever came this way with sound of rime,  
In quest of Beauty's face.

"He knew life's immemorial grief—the cry  
 Of young Love with the ruined rainbow wings,  
 The pathos of the vanishing, the sigh  
 Out of all mortal things.

. . . . .  
 "He walked our streets as on a lonely strand:  
 His country was not here—it was afar.  
 Not here his home, not here his motherland,  
 But in some statelier star."

From that first youthful dream, quickened and awakened by the old school-teacher; from that first creative line: "When all the tombs of earth are tenantless" to "Our Israfel"; from 1865 to 1925; the stream of poetry flows through Markham's life; and here where it empties into the sea of literature; here we study its composition, its wonder, its beauty; and know the source from which it sprang; and watch the long life through which it flowed; and know that it all has been glorified through these years. The stream of Poetry in the life of Edwin Markham is a part of the stream of his own self-consciousness, as will be illustrated by his striking comparison of poetry, science and the spiritual life, in the following paragraphs:

"Poetry, one of the fundamental facts of our existence, stands on its own ground with its feet on the earth, its hands outstretched over the continents and its head among the stars, its eyes ashine with celestial light," he declared.

"The man who looks only at the spiritual side of life becomes a fanatic and the man who devotes

himself only to the material becomes a materialist and is only half a man.

"There is something beyond the beauty of nature and it is the duty of the artist to reveal it. The only great thing is creation.

"Science gives us the intellectual conception of life, but poetry touches the world beyond science, which stretches into sentiment, hopes, dreams, and great aspirations."

## CHAPTER V

### “AND AT THE FIRST BREAK OF MY SOCIAL SONG”

#### SOMETHING OF THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IN HIS SOUL

**I**N an interview with Christopher Morley, on books, Herbert Hoover said:

“Perhaps what this country needs is a great poem, something to lift people out of fear and selfishness. Every once in a while someone catches words out of the air and gives a nation an inspiration. You remember Kipling’s ‘Recessional,’ and that poem of Markham’s suggested by Millet’s painting, ‘The Man With the Hoe.’ We need something to raise our eyes beyond the immediate horizon. A great nation can’t go along just watching its feet. The kind of words I imagine needn’t be very complicated. I’d like to see something simple enough for a child to put his hand on his chest and spout in school on Fridays. I keep looking for it, but I don’t see it. Sometimes a great poem can do more than legislation.”

When Mahatma Gandhi went into what came to be known as the Death Fast, he stated that one of the books he was taking into his jail exile was *Fors Clavigera*, by Ruskin, a book to which Mr.



Markham refers in this chapter as one of the great social documents which shaped his own thinking.

John Haynes Holmes, one of America's great social thinkers, said of the poet on the event of his latest book, *Eighty Songs at Eighty*:

"Edwin Markham is America's poet laureate—an honor secured not by official appointment but by universal public acclaim. He walks in the succession of the great poets who are also prophets, and has voiced more truly and beautifully than any other singer the ideals of America and of this modern age. As he stands on the summit of his eighty years he has the ineffable experience of looking toward a horizon already aglow with the light of his immortality."

We cannot begin to understand all that the "First Break of my Social Song," and the growth of social consciousness, has meant and means to Edwin Markham until we have read his poem, "The Muse of Brotherhood," from *Lincoln and Other Poems*, and with that poem we set the background for this chapter:

"I am in the Expectancy that runs:

My feet are in the Future, whirled afar  
On wings of light. If I have any sons,  
Let them arise and follow to my star.

"Some momentary touches of my fire

Have warmed the barren ages with a beam:  
There is no peak beyond my swift desire,  
There is no beauty deeper than my dream.

- "I make an end of life's stupendous jest—  
The merry waste of fortunes by the Few,  
While the thin faces of the poor are pressed  
Against the panes—a hungry whirlwind crew.
- "I come to lift the soul-destroying weight,  
To heal the hurt, to end the foolish loss,  
To take the toiler from his brutal fate—  
The toiler hanging on the Labor Cross.
- "I bring to Earth the feel of home again,  
That men may nestle on her warm, still breast;  
I bring to wronged, humiliated men  
The sacred right to labor and to rest.
- "I bring to men the fine ideal stuff  
The young gods took to build the spheres of old:  
The fire I send on men is great enough  
To burn the iron kingdoms into gold.
- "I hold the way until the bright heavens bend—  
Until the New Republic shall arise,  
And quick young deities again descend,  
Bringing the gifts of God with joyous cries.
- "And at the first break of my Social Song  
A hush will fall upon the foolish strife,  
As though a joyous god, serene and strong,  
Shined suddenly before the steps of life.
- "Cold hearts that falter are my only bar:  
Heroes that seek my ever-fading goal  
Must take their reckoning from the central star,  
And follow the equator: I am Soul.
- "My love is higher than heavens where Taurus wheels,  
My love is deeper than the pillared skies:  
High as that peak in Heaven where Milton kneels,  
Deep as that grave in Hell where Cæsar lies.

"Still hope for man: my star is on the way!

Great Hugo saw it from his prison isle;

It lit the mighty dream of Lamennais;

It led the ocean thunders of Carlyle.

"Wise Greeley saw the star of my desire,

Wise Lincoln knelt before my hidden flame:

It was from me they drew their sacred fire—

I am Religion by her deeper name."

The birth of social consciousness came to Edwin Markham, the first gleam of it, when he was about sixteen years of age, while he was still a school boy in California.

At eight came his first glimpse into the great literature of all time; at thirteen came "The Enchanter" into his life, the man who quickened and awakened him to the world of poetry and to his own creative genius. Now at sixteen years of age we find him catching the first glow of the social vision; his first comradeship with humanity; his first impulse to ally himself with the outcast, the down-trodden, the man in the abyss.

Even in his earliest boyhood days the boy Edwin knew the necessity and the grind of toil. He has little memory of days when he was free from the daily task of making a livelihood.

"My earliest memory," he says, "is a memory of hoeing and weeding the orchard and garden from dawn to dusk on my mother's ranch in the little Lagoon Valley of the Suisun Hills. A thousand times I have felt the ache in the back, and the utter

weariness of the long unbroken day's toil with no prospect ahead but another day's work. I have known the utter futility felt by the poor peasant burdened by special conditions as he leaned on his hoe."

Leaving the boy of sixteen, we go forward for half a century to hear the acclaim of the critics of the earth as to his pioneering supremacy in the social order, and to hear the poet himself trace the growth of the social consciousness in his soul. In the next chapter the story of the writing of "The Man With the Hoe" will be told, but just here it seems wise to discuss the growth of the social thinking of his mind, and to trace its origin, as we have traced the origin of poetry in his life.

Lest there be a few readers of this book who do not know of Edwin Markham's accepted leadership in this realm of the new social order, let us first hear the testimony of the thinking contemporaries of the first quarter of this century; those who have seen, and who have been able to estimate the value and the effect of the Markhamic philosophy on the social movements of these twenty-five years. Some of the beginnings of the present social thinking have been forgotten by this generation. Some of the very men who live and move and have their being in the cause of social justice have been so busy in the battle line itself that they have forgotten—if they ever knew—what influence started it all back in the beginnings of the present century. We talk these



days in terms of the Soviet government, Communism, kingdoms and monarchies overthrown, capitalism toppling on its throne; we hear a great Englishman saying that "capitalism is inefficient, inhumane, and insecure." We hear even a man like Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick saying that "unless capitalism gives a better accounting of its stewardship in terms of humanity, our children's children in this nation will live under some form of Communism." We hear parlor socialists; the so-called "Reds," and their followers talking on every corner; and in many pulpits of this nation. Books on Russia and "social justice" are pouring by thousands from the presses. Even the church has developed a new phrase—"The social gospel." But few of those who follow the noonday light of this social vision remember its dawning in the beginning of this century; or remember the place that Edwin Markham had in its birth.

Therefore at this place I am going to give a summary of the opinions of the great of the earth as to Markham's place as the pioneer prophet of this new social era.

Jessie B. Rittenhouse, universally recognized as one of America's authoritative anthologists and critics, is quoted on the editorial page of the conservative Boston *Transcript* as saying of the social quickening that Edwin Markham gave to American writing:

"When the century came in and Edwin Markham

came forward, he took up the social movement and particularized it. He began immediately to arraign society. The question of labor, of the poor, of the injustice of toil without hope, was in the air. It was in the air and no one had crystallized it until suddenly appeared Edwin Markham's 'The Man With the Hoe.' The man with the hoe is not a man with a hoe at all; he is the man in the sweat-shop, he is the stoker down in the bowels of the ocean liner; he is the man in the coal mine; he is the man anywhere who is working without privilege. He is the man working without the fruit of his toil; the man working without hope, the man working without joy; and the hoe is but a symbol, which at the same time crystallized, spiritualized, and brought before us this great human problem. It did more than that: it awakened society to its social responsibility—what we call the social conscience, as against social consciousness. After Markham wrote that poem a wave seemed to pass over American poetry—what we call the social wave. Immediately all the American poets began to think of what they could do to interpret his new movement. One of the first social poems to follow Markham's work was Robert Haven Schauffler's 'Scum of the Earth.' But it was Edwin Markham who pioneered this new note. He sent an electrical quickening into the poetry of our age. He may fairly be said to have originated a new tendency in our literature, a tendency that turns for inspiration

to the common and human in the life of the toiling and struggling millions about us."<sup>1</sup>

No less a creative genius than Professor William James said: "Impressive in the highest degree is Edwin Markham's 'The Man With the Hoe,' and it reeks with humanity and morality."

Francis Grierson puts it: "Edwin Markham is one of the greatest poets of the age, and the greatest poet of democracy, social passion, and human justice. He is the everlasting cry of downtrodden labor."

Joaquin Miller shouts out: "Markham's 'The Man With the Hoe' is the whole Yosemite—the thunder, the might, the majesty."

When "The Man With the Hoe" appeared, one newspaper critic said, "This great poem is regarded as the mightiest expression of the mightiest problem of all times—the problem of social justice."

John Burns, representative of labor in the British Cabinet for years, said of this social prophet: "Edwin Markham's 'Lincoln, the Man of the People,' is the greatest American poem, and 'The Man With the Hoe' is undoubtedly the greatest poem of the world, because it alone, of all other poems, has set forth, once and forever, the social cry of humanity."

Joseph Dana Miller, editor of *The Single Tax Review*, said, when "The Man With the Hoe" was published: "This poem by Edwin Markham is the

<sup>1</sup> Used by permission of *The Boston Evening Transcript*.

greatest short poem of our generation. No other poet has ever voiced the wrongs of outraged humanity—no other poet has ever flung his challenge so boldly into the teeth of custom—no other poet has ever pictured in such awful blackness the consequences that rush down from social injustice—no other poet has ever portrayed in such prophetic fashion the coming of the time when Love shall conquer tyranny and greed. Edwin Markham is the one great poet left in America.”

The New York *Times* Book Review page gave Edwin Markham full credit for creating a new social era in the literature of this nation: “Edwin Markham first arrested attention as a poet of the social vision. The poetry of the younger group in America was barren of the social motive before the appearance of his poem, ‘The Man With the Hoe.’ Whitman’s message had not crystallized into definite social expression in our poetry. The social unrest of the 90’s, all of the passion for social justice then springing into life had found no spiritual expression in American art until Edwin Markham, with the vision of a seer focused all to a luminous center in ‘The Man With the Hoe.’ Instantly America responded, a new realm was made free, and a great influx of vitality poured into American poetry. He may well be said to have marked a new period in American poetry, to have sounded a new note of social thinking; to have created a new school of writing.”



Alfred Russell Wallace, co-discoverer of the theory of evolution with Charles Darwin, said, "Edwin Markham is the greatest poet of the social passion that has yet appeared in the world."

Jay William Hudson said: "Markham's 'The Man With the Hoe' will be the battle cry of the next thousand years."

Harriett Monroe, one of our great poetry editors, says, "In Edwin Markham's poem, 'The Man With the Hoe,' the passion for social righteousness fuses into a white heat, and is molded by the great poet into a pure form of austere beauty."

Conceding that Edwin Markham is our greatest living poet-prophet of the social passion, our task is to find out where that passion was born. He himself says:

"The Gospel of Jesus first influenced me to the social consciousness. I was about sixteen, and every Sunday I went down to the old Black School House on the road between Becaville and Suisun, in Central California. I walked every Sunday six miles to Sunday school, where, by the way, a Methodist minister held forth in impassioned sermons. He must have been seventy. He spoke with tremendous fervor, and never closed a sermon without weeping copiously. After every sermon came Sunday school. I was always there with ten or twelve verses committed to memory out of the Gospel of Matthew.

"I read widely in the Gospels because I was en-

chanted by the passion and the idealism of Jesus. I came across the expression 'the kingdom of heaven,' and slowly it dawned upon my consciousness that this referred to a new order of life in the world for men and women. That was my first gleam of the Comrade Dream. That was my baptism into the new social order. Ever since that hour I have looked upon the Gospels as the greatest political and social document in the world.

"It was not long after this—perhaps when I was seventeen—that I came upon a great romance by Victor Hugo, *The Man Who Laughs*. I read it with burning heart and greedy interest, for it was a story of a boy who had been mutilated—his mouth cut wide, until his face seemed to be laughing all the time.

"This lad was kidnaped by persons who wished to secure his property and his title, for he was an English boy who was in line to inherit a lordship. He belonged to the home of Lord Clancharley.

"That book got me hard! It reached deep into my heart. This boy, Gwynplane, after serving on a ship of pirates, escaped and fell in with a traveling showman named Homo. This Homo was a prophet out of the abyss. This Homo was a man who burned with the sacred fire of social democracy. This Homo poured the social conflagration of his spirit into the boy, and later on, when he was restored to his inheritance as a lord, and went into the English Parliament and took his seat, he found Parliament

dealing with a bill to confer several more millions upon the royal family. When it came his turn to vote he was the only one who voted No!

“All eyes turned with startled and angry looks at him—and jeered him. He rose to explain his vote. Someone shouted: ‘Where did you come from?’ He answered: ‘Out of the bottomless pit! I came here, gentlemen, from the hungry, from the destitute, from the profane, from the plundered. I came to tell you men who are highly placed that there is an earthquake under you, getting ready to shake the continent. Give this money to the hungry; to those who created it out of the labor of their hands!’ And so—on he went uttering one of the most terrific philippics ever heard by human kind.

“This great document by Victor Hugo sang into my soul and made vital and real the gospel of the Christ whose whisper I heard in my earlier youth.

“The third thing that awakened my soul was a book by Charles Fourier, the great French social philosopher, who lived in the early days of the nineteenth century. Fourier was the Shakespeare of the social and industrial vision. He awakened the world. Horace Greeley here in America became his excited and impassioned follower; and hundreds of others in England and America. Albert Brisbane, father of Arthur Brisbane, was in the front line of the new crusade. The elder Brisbane translated some of the works of Fourier; and the introductory volume was called *The Introduction to So-*

*cial Theory*. This was the first great utterance on the social conception of life ever given to the English-speaking race. When I was about twenty I heard of this volume and sent to New York for it. It further electrified my throbbing spirit. It showed that humanity had been moving on by a slow march to this social destiny. It opened the doors into a mighty dream.

"I saw at once what I still believe—that Jesus in his vision of the Comrade Kingdom, that Victor Hugo in his impassioned defense of the struggling millions, and that Charles Fourier in his vast conceptions of our social possibilities, were all three moving toward the same great ends of life.

"A few years after this I turned to the Gospels of Jesus and gave them a careful reading once again in the light of this social and industrial dream. I soon saw that Jesus mentions the church only three times, but that he mentions the kingdom of heaven one hundred and twenty-two times. I soon saw that to realize the kingdom of heaven on earth, which is a new social and industrial order, in which men would live as brothers; as consecrated comrades, was indeed the crowning purpose in the mind of the Christ.

"I saw that the only way to harmonize the gospel, to make all the sayings of Jesus and the parables of Jesus fit into one harmony or mosaic, was to take the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven as the central principle of the whole New Testament. If you



take this idea of a comrade kingdom as the key, you can unlock the whole mystery of the Passion and mission of Christ in the world.

"The church is the committee on ways and means of establishing the kingdom of this social and industrial order upon the earth. It is not the end, but the means.

"Having reached this ground, I turned my eyes over human history and I discovered that some of the greatest leaders of mankind had this conception of a kingdom of comrades in their minds. They had expressed it only dimly in their lives and in their words—but they did express it.

"I found that the early Christian Church was all afire, down to the time of Constantine, with this idea of a new kingdom in the world, a kingdom of love, labor, and loyalty, a kingdom wherein the Christ would be the central and eternal Ruler.

"Next I found this conception of the Comrade Kingdom—a dim conception in the mind of that lofty soul, Saint Francis of Assisi. Next I came upon Joseph Mazzini, one of the loftiest souls of all times; and I found that he too had a vision of this new social order, wherein men would be brought into right relationships with one another; into brotherly and fraternal relations, relations which would leave them saved from the disorders and the anarchies of the system that we call civilization.

"Next I came upon another one of the great sons of Christ, another great patriot of humanity; I refer

to Félicité Robert de Lamennais. He began as a Catholic priest in France, but he was touched with the social passion of the Christ, and he soon saw that we must have an applied Christianity in the economic and in the social orders of the people, so that the people could be lifted out of their sorrows and poverties and be able to live a complete life.

"He established a paper called *The Future*, and he drew into his social labor group, Lacordaire, the great French Catholic orator; and Montalembert, the distinguished Catholic historian. These three began to scatter these social ideas into the minds of the people.

"They were three flaming heralds of the Christ of the social passion. Very soon the princes of the church heard about this, and they were at once reported to his Holiness, the Pope. The Pope immediately demanded that they, as humble sons of the church, should appear before him. They sped to Rome at once.

"They waited three weeks for an audience, but received none; then turned homeward to France. On the way they were overtaken by an emissary of the Pope, who demanded of each a recantation of all his hopes and dreams; a recantation that each one was asked to sign on the spot. Lecordaire and Montalembert signed the recantation and fled to the church for protection. Lamennais wrote at the bottom of his sheet:

" 'I sign this with the strict understanding that

under no circumstances will I ever do anything that I think is against the interests of humanity.' "

"This was not satisfactory to the Pope. The young prophet was told to go into retirement in the Forest of Fontainebleau. He went, and during the year he wrote an astounding volume called *The Words of a Believer*. It was a terrific arraignment of the apathy and indifference of the church to the social commands of the Christ. The Pope said when he saw the book, 'It is small in size but immense in perversity!' Lamennais was immediately excommunicated and sent into all the hells there were. Lamennais remained serene, but began to organize the people to carry out this great dream. In three or four weeks he organized one hundred and fifty thousand people. In his will he said that no church should officiate at his funeral, but that if there was any earnest, honest, humble man of the people, who desired to, he should stand at his grave and say a word, and he would be glad. These honest and earnest men were the true priests of the Almighty.

"At the next turn of the road I came upon the writings of John Ruskin. In books like *Fors Clavigera*, and *The Crown of Wild Olives*, he sets forth in brilliant periods the social gospel of Jesus.

"Thomas Carlyle in such books as *Past and Present* supports this great thesis.

"I also wish to bear witness to several volumes by William Dean Howells in our own nation, especially to that world-startling volume, *A Traveler From*

*Altruria*, and to that later *Through the Needle's Eye*. All Americans who are truly patriotic and intelligent should love William Dean Howells as one of the highest and noblest men in the modern world.

"Finally, I could not complete this story of the birth and evolution of my social passion if I did not go back, chronologically, to those impassioned weeks and months when, through my reading of Albert Brisbane's translation of *The Introduction to Social Theory*, my soul was ready for that great event; my first glimpse of Millet's painting of 'The Man With the Hoe.'

"Already rich, ripe soil was waiting for my first glimpse of that symbol of all that I had been reading, from the Gospel of Jesus in my childhood days, the Victor Hugo social philosophy in *The Man Who Laughs* in my early youth, followed by my contacts with Charles Fourier, Mazzini, Lammenais, John Ruskin, and William Dean Howells—my soul was ready to burst into my poem urged from me by that great painting."

It is a great tale; a tale of majestic proportions. It is a story of a gigantic sequoia tree of Markham's own California, with roots reaching down deep into the social literature of his early youth; but deeper still into the cool, clean soil of the social gospel of Jesus expressed in what Markham calls "the Comrade Kingdom of the new social and industrial order on earth."



However, we cannot fully understand the power and the glory of the social stream that flows through the life of Edwin Markham until we have read some other of his social poems which supplement "The Man With the Hoe." These others, as far as the reader is concerned, must be the foothills which lead up to that great Mount Shasta of all his social poetry.

The first group of foothills are the shorter social poems, some of which are here quoted.

In "The New Trinity" Markham sums up briefly his great slogan of life, which is that life "must contain three things, Bread, Beauty, and Brotherhood":

"Three things must man possess if his soul would live  
And know life's perfect good—  
Three things would the all-supplying Father give—  
Bread, Beauty, and Brotherhood."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps more widely known than any of his briefer poems is "Outwitted," which drops like a seed in the soil of the soul; all the beauty, color, and perfume of the social thinking:

"He drew a circle that shut me out—  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him in!"<sup>2</sup>

In a poem entitled "No Self to Serve," from *Eighty Songs at Eighty*, it is interesting to note that the poet in his own handwriting in my first edition

<sup>1</sup> From *Eighty Songs at Eighty*.

<sup>2</sup> From *The Shoes of Happiness*.

copy of that book has scratched out the original title and has substituted the title, "The Christus." It rings with these regnant lines:

"Why does he make our hearts so strangely still?  
Why stands he forth so stately and so tall?  
Because he has no self to serve, no will  
That does not seek the welfare of the all."

Back to the Gospels and the spirit of Jesus he goes in that simple four-lined verse; back to the original source of the inspiration of his whole social dream.

Nor does he lack a sense of biting sarcasm in his social quatrains, as will be noted in this as yet unpublished poem:

"Between the rich and the poor  
The difference is only a splinter:  
The rich man gets his ice in the summer,  
The poor man gets his in the winter."

One of the most tender of his shorter social poems on service is entitled "Medicine":

"Is there a wound, O brother, in your heart,  
And would you have the secret grief depart?  
Heal first your brother's sorrow, hush his moan,  
And that will heal the anguish of your own."

In striking contrast with that tender social quatrain is his terrific indictment of social injustice in "The Third Wonder":

"'Two things,' said Kant, 'fill me with breathless awe:  
The starry heaven and the moral law.'  
But I know a thing more awful and obscure—  
The long, long patience of the plundered poor."

Of Markham's more recent foothill social poems which lead up to the high peak of "The Man With the Hoe" the most impressive is "The Toiler," which he calls "The Hoe-Man of the Ages," written after seeing Rodin's "The Thinker." Three stanzas of this poem are here quoted from *Eighty Songs at Eighty*:

"What strange awakening shape is this—  
What is his breed, his genesis?  
Peer into the past; from every age  
His visage stares in silent rage.  
Down the long centuries he came.  
Who is he? Ask the sands his name.  
Who is he? Ask the leaves that die  
And have no language but a sigh.  
Ask the gray fields he plowed for bread  
To feed the nations—he, unfed.  
Ask the slow vultures as they wheel  
Over the battles for a meal.

"Behold, he is the Toiling Man,  
Unresting since the world began.  
What blind road had he come to this—  
Out of what darkness, what abyss?  
Grinding grim blocks in ages gone,  
His groans gave Greece the Parthenon:  
Out of the deeps of his despair,  
The Colosseum whirled in air.  
But somewhere in the night of years  
The bricks of Babel felt his tears.  
Back in the ages stooped with loads,  
Silent to curses and to goads,  
With panting mouth and sullen lids,  
He piled the monstrous Pyramids.

Yea, staggering under stripes and scars,  
He heaved huge Cheops to the stars.  
The Memphian Sphinxes in their day  
Saw him go by as still as they;  
And on all roads he ever trod  
His silence was his cry to God."

Then with this stirring verse, Edwin Markham ends this poem:

"Behold, O world, the Toiling Man,  
Bearing earth's burden and her ban.  
Because of his all-giving grace,  
Kaisers and kings have held their place—  
Because he gave ungrudging toil.  
The Lords have had the world for spoil—  
Because he gave them all his dower,  
Great ladies glittered out their hour.  
He clothed these paupers, gave them bed,  
Put into their mouths their daily bread.  
And his reward? A crust to taste,  
An unknown grave upon the waste.  
Outcast and cursed, befooled and flayed,  
With earth's brute burdens on him laid,  
He only reacht out humble hands,  
Reacht out his mercies on all lands.  
How silent down the world he trod—  
How patient he has been with God!"<sup>1</sup>

Now, after having caught a glimpse of Markham's foothill poems of the social gospel, and the growth of social consciousness in his soul, we are ready for a complete story of the great Mount Shasta of them all, "The Man With the Hoe."

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<sup>1</sup>From *Eighty Songs at Eighty*.



## CHAPTER VI

### "THE MAN WITH THE HOE"

#### AN INTERPRETATION OF HIS SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

EDWIN MARKHAM'S "The Man With the Hoe" is his best-known poem, and a direct outgrowth of the development of the social passion in his life. In the full and free development of his thought life "The Man With the Hoe" was the perfect flowering of all the social reading and thinking which he had been doing for fifteen years.

When young Edwin Markham reached the age of nineteen, in 1871, he and his ever loyal and intelligent mother moved to San José, California, as we read in the second chapter, because in that town there was a State Normal School. They had a hard time during these years, and during the struggle for an education the young man learned the blacksmith's trade and worked at it for a long stretch of time. Leaving the San José Normal, in the midst of his course, he went to Santa Rosa and entered the Christian College, from which he graduated, following this with a short law course. Instead of practicing law, as he originally intended, he went to El Dorado County to teach school. The poet was now thirty-four years of age.

During all these years of schooling, his educa-

tional struggles in San José and Santa Rosa, the social passion has been growing in Markham's soul. He is not only being fed from within but he is being torn asunder from without over the social injustices of our civilization. During these formative years of his thinking the young man has been growing in stature and spirit. He is quite accustomed to debating the questions of social import with his like-minded friends, and on public platforms, in churches and in schools. As a school-teacher in El Dorado County, in the foothills of the Sierras, he is looked upon with great respect and affection. The young people follow his leadership, and the older people listen with respect to his social opinions.

The world of poetry had become static. Walt Whitman had written his social poems, but the world had not caught the full implications of them. Joaquin Miller was writing in a stumbling, blundering fashion, trying to feel his way into some sort of social expression.

Who could know that the voice of a young poet in his early thirties, unknown east of the Rockies, was soon to be heard around the world, like the immortal shot fired at Concord Bridge; and that through a single poem?

This complete and sudden recognition came to young Edwin Markham with as much of a surprise as his event was a surprise to the literary world itself. Out of the Far West came this unknown voice; came this voice of thunder-blasts and light-

ning strokes; came this veritable California earthquake, with enough of a shock to shake the social, industrial, political, economic and literary world to its foundations.

Perhaps there has been nothing like this immediate recognition through a single poem in the history of the literature of the world. The event of Edwin Markham can fairly be called one of the highest moments in the literary life of this new nation. Enough has been said in the preceding chapter, enough testimonies marshaled to justify that statement.

“The Man With the Hoe” has been translated into more than forty different languages. It has been reproduced in magazines, newspapers, and books twelve thousand times. It has had about four thousand parodies written on it, and, within a year after its premier publication, more than five thousand answers were written to it. It has been called “The battle-cry of revolution” all over the earth. It has been chanted in song and it has stirred the social dreams of millions.

Let the poet himself tell the dramatic story of the writing of the great poem and its launching down the ways of the world’s literary seas. I feel that such a first-person story will be more authoritative and factual. It is the story just as he told it to this writer with the understanding that it was to be the final and accredited story of the writing of this great social poem.

"I wrote the first verse of 'The Man With the Hoe' in 1886, and then nothing happened for thirteen years. I shall never be able to wipe out the memory of that April afternoon, about four o'clock, back in 1886. I was teaching school in El Dorado County, California. A young friend used to come in to see me every afternoon and talk over the affairs of the earth. His name was Melville Upton. He was an artist of a high type, and an idealist. He was thinking along the same social lines as myself and made my office his rendezvous every day after school.

"One day he came in with a copy of *Scribner's Magazine* of the March issue and showed me a black-and-white illustration of Millet's 'The Man With the Hoe.' "

"He was twenty-four and I was thirty-four years of age. I had been reading Charles Fourier, a French sociologist. At least I had been reading *An Introduction to the Writings of Charles Fourier*, by Albert Brisbane, father of Arthur Brisbane, the editorial writer. He was a young man who was full of noble dreams; a man who believed that there could be a juster order of society on earth. Therefore, he joined with Horace Greeley, George Ripley, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and others in a social reform movement which was, for that time, considered radical. However, what that group stood for is now the thought of all people. This movement flowered in the famous Brooks Farm experiment, which was a



failure. But the idea which this group launched sails on forever.

"This book fired my mind. I read more of Fourier. I had been saturating my soul with this literature for seven years, when it all focused in a burning flash of light that April afternoon about four o'clock in 1886, when my young artist friend brought in the magazine containing the print of 'The Man With the Hoe.'

"He was the man at the bottom of the human ladder. Melville Upton and I sat looking at that Scribner print, and he said, 'That's the man you have been talking about!'

"'Yes, Melville, that's the man! His problem must be solved or humanity's problem will never be solved.'

"He went out of my room, but I was enchanted with that black-and-white picture. I had never seen it before. It held my soul, as one is held by some object of menace and terror. I could not get the picture of that degraded 'Hoe-Man' from my mind. It haunted me like some threat of eternal judgment. I could hear Christ crying out from that ruin of a man. I immediately jotted down in an old note book the first verse of my poem:

'Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans  
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,  
The emptiness of ages in his face,  
And on his back the burden of the world.'

"Here were the few opening words, just enough to hold the place, enough to nail fast my purpose to write a poem that should cry the lost rights of the toiling multitude in the abyss of civilization—the multitude helplessly chained to the present, fettered to their narrow field, deprived of the enlarging education of the mind, deprived of the ennobling education of the heart.

"The cares of the world came in. I had written that first verse in an old black, cloth-covered notebook. We moved to Oakland, California, in 1898. I had been made the head of the Observation School in the University of California.

"Thirteen years after the first verse was written I went to San Francisco one Saturday afternoon in December of 1898 to an exhibit of paintings in the home of Mrs. William Crocker. There I saw the original painting of 'The Man With the Hoe.'

"The original of this great painting enchanted me even more than the copy I had seen thirteen years before. I sat for two hours before it, lost to the world. The terror of its import and the majesty of its ruin stunned my soul. I went away from that place half in air and half on the earth. I flew to my home rather than rode. That Saturday afternoon, about five o'clock, just before supper, I wrote the second verse of the poem.

"All the next day, which was Sunday, I brooded over that third verse. I could think of nothing else. I lived in a strange realm. I seemed to be a medium

through which some great event was to transpire. I did not seem myself all that day. I went to sleep, and all night long I dreamed of the poem. Then, just at dawn the third verse came flashing up out of the depths, and I leaped out of bed and wrote it down in a burning fire of creative effort. It came out of the early light of the morning.

"The fourth verse came the same way. On Monday I brooded again all day long and could think of nothing else and do nothing else. It was vacation time and I had leisure—a necessity for the writing of poetry. I was possessed with the idea and the music of that poem. I went to bed and on Tuesday morning I had the same experience and the entire fourth stanza came flashing up in completed form out of my subconscious self to birth. I leaped out of bed again and wrote that fourth verse down.

"The fifth stanza came in exactly that same way. On Tuesday I spent the day walking and thinking of that picture and the idea for the poem. I knew that it was not yet completed; that it had not all come to me. I went to bed again and slept all night, and at dawn the fifth verse came like a thunder out of the morning skies, and the poem was practically completed.

"I wrote it in the same old black notebook in which I had written the first verse thirteen years before. In fact, it was a perusal of the first stanza after I saw the original painting that Saturday afternoon which gave me the form of the poem."

"Is that old black notebook still in existence?" I asked him, knowing that it would be a valuable relic if it still existed. The poet thought that he still had it among his cast-aside material.

"In fact, the discovery of that old black book and the first stanza of the poem inspired me to go to see the original painting. I had heard that it was in San Francisco, and that visitors could see it. I said to myself, 'I must finish that poem!' "

"Shortly after this I went to San José, California, to visit my mother and my old home, and on that trip put the entire poem into final shape and form. It is my habit to write in rugged form, and I often change a poem and rewrite it nine or ten times. When I came back to Oakland, California, from that vacation trip I showed my new poem to Mrs. Markham."

"What did she say and was she the first to see it?" I asked him.

"She was the first to see it and she exclaimed: 'It's a powerful piece of work. Where are you going to send it?' I had been writing verses since 1880, for nineteen years before I wrote this poem. The *Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*, *Century*, and other magazines were buying my poems.

" 'I won't send it to any magazine,' I said.

" 'Why not?'

" 'No magazine in America would print it. It has enough dynamite in it to blow up most of the social traditions of our civilization.' "



"Then how did it get to the American public?" I asked him.

"About two weeks later I was invited to a literary gathering in San Francisco at the home of Carroll Carrington, a young newspaper man. Bailey Millard, editor of the San Francisco *Examiner*, was present and about twenty-five others. We were sitting around the wall. Carroll called on each of us for a joke, a story or some original contribution to entertain the crowd. When he came to me, it suddenly occurred to me that I had my new poem in my pocket. I had not intended to read it. In fact, I did not know that we were to be called upon to contribute anything to the evening's entertainment. I arose and read my poem, with a few words of apology and explanation."

"How was it received by that first group that heard it?" I questioned, and waited.

"They were as still as stones when I finished. Two minutes went by and Bailey Millard, who sat at the opposite end of the row from me, leaped to his feet, came across the room and said: 'Let me read it! Let me see that poem!'

"I handed it to him and he read it hastily. Then he reread it again and again. He finally handed it back to me and said, 'That poem will go down through the centuries!'

"Then he turned away. But he came back to me while the others waited, and said, 'Mr. Markham, I would like to have the honor of printing that

poem in the *Examiner*. I will advertise it as only we know how to advertise.'

"I said to Mr. Millard: 'You are the only man who will print it, and I will let you have it. Get ready for a great concussion!'

"It was published in the middle of the editorial page December 28, 1899. I am accustomed to saying that the 'poem appeared in the dawn of the twentieth century.'"

Then for two years there followed intense controversy. Probably no poem that was ever written and launched stirred up more differences of opinion; more excitement among all classes than "The Man With the Hoe." The story of this controversy is the second great step in the wide recognition of this American poem.

"Editors began to copy the poem up and down the Pacific Coast. They called it 'The Poem of the Hour,' and 'The Trumpet Blast of the Coming Century.' Dr. David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford, went up and down the coast delivering a lecture on this poem. He gave that lecture more than two hundred times, and I heard it twice. I was greatly complimented by it. He took the view that the 'Hoe-Man' was caused by military selection; that the better class of men are drafted and the race is left only the inferiors to build on; that military selection causes race degeneration. The San Francisco papers ran full columns of letters about the poem for a year. It was attacked from every possible

angle. It was attacked from the viewpoint of theology, sociology, anthropology, and from every other viewpoint.

"The interest in the poem grew so widely that the *Examiner* established, instead of a single column, a daily page on which the discussions continued for six months longer. At the top of this page was the headline: 'The Persistent Discussion of the Man With the Hoe!'

"After this discussion had run for six months longer with a full page every day, the *Examiner* sent a questionnaire out to the literary lights of that day asking them: First, 'What do you think of this poem, "The Man With the Hoe?"' Second, 'Is it to become a permanent figure in American letters?' "

Mr. Markham, the poet himself, received just forty dollars for the poem from the *Examiner*. This is, incidentally, just what Milton received for "*Paradise Lost*."

It is doubtful if ever the launching of a poem carried a full page of comments for six months straight, without a break. This focused circulation attention on the San Francisco *Examiner*. Then came one of the strangest additional boosts that Fate ever gave a poem.

A California editor, Fremont Older, editor of the San Francisco *Bulletin*, published an editorial asking the question on its front page headlines: "Is 'The Man With the Hoe' a *Plagiarism*?" Then followed a story of the appearance of a poem by a Miss

Chase in *The Californian*. This poem was headed a little differently from Mr. Markham's poem, for its title was "A Man With a Hoe."

The *Bulletin* editor was simply after a scarehead. He was careful not to say that it was a plagiarism. He simply asked the question. He was being scooped every day by a rival paper which had been fortunate enough to get the first publication of the poem itself. He had to get in on the discussion some way since the poem was taking first-page space in a rival newspaper, so he published that startling headline one evening.

While the big city editor was most careful not to get himself into a libel suit by accusing the poet of plagiarism, the smaller inland papers of California were not so careful, and, instead of merely asking a question about the matter, they openly stated that Markham's poem was a plagiarism from Miss Chase. Markham began to get clippings of these editorials. All of them gave the San Francisco *Bulletin* as authority for the statement.

Mr. Markham immediately went to Mr. Older and showed him the clipping from the smaller papers of the state accusing him of plagiarism and citing as authority the San Francisco *Bulletin*. But let Mr. Markham tell of this episode:

"I went to Mr. Older. He looked at the clippings and got greatly excited, exclaiming, 'They're all damned liars! We never charged you with plagiarism! It was a good news story that Miss



Chase had written a poem before yours appeared with a title similar to yours. The news editor tacked on that heading to make it startling. He played that up to attract attention to the *Bulletin*."

"Well, what will you do about it?" the poet asked him.

"I'll write an editorial demanding that every one of those editors make that slander right and apologize to you publicly. That editorial ran something like this:

'Gentlemen! Stand up in a row!

'You charge Edwin Markham with plagiarism, and give us as your authority. We made no such charge. The *Bulletin* does not think and never did think that Mr. Markham plagiarized his poem from Miss Chase. There is no similarity between them whatever. The *Bulletin* expects every one of you to make an editorial apology for your statement, which shall be as prominently displayed as your first error. We shall watch you and see that you do.'

Then the San Francisco *Bulletin*, swinging into the procession of popularity on the wake of the launching of the white ship of "The Man With the Hoe," stole some of its neighbor newspaper's thunder and issued a questionnaire. They sent out the poem of Miss Chase and the poem of Edwin Markham, and asked whether or not the literary lights thought it was a plagiarism. All answers but one said that there was not the slightest suggestion of plagiarism.

Ambrose Bierce, the most famous literary critic of that day, sent a special messenger to say: "I've

examined both poems. There is no similarity whatsoever, for hers is a dainty sentimentalism, while Markham's manuscript has the power of terrific protest."

This critic's word killed the query, and another chapter in this launching of a great poem was finished.

Then the poem leaped from the Pacific Coast into the middle western country. Hundreds of replies, editorials, and cartoons began to appear in newspapers from San Francisco to Chicago. Many mid-west papers took the poem as an indictment of the farmer and of labor; and for political purposes office-seeking champions arose like Sir Galahads to defend their constituencies.

"However," says Mr. Markham, "it is significant that no workman has ever attacked the poem."

Cartoons were made of the American farmer wielding his hoe, with his head up, bright and buoyant. Dr. Edward Holland, a minister in Saint Louis, preached a series of twelve sermons on the poem, and these were put into book form.

Cartoons appeared in Chicago papers with humorous titles, such as "The Man With the Dough," "The Man With the Hoe-Press," "Women Under the Heel of the Man With the Hoe."

Then the controversy leaped from the Middle West to the Atlantic Coast and the New York papers took it up. Collis P. Huntington, the man who built the Southern Pacific Railroad, offered a prize

of \$2,000 to the man who would write an answer to the poem. Five thousand answers came in.

The New York *Sun* was made the custodian of this fund, and the publicity agent of the contest, Edmund Clarence Stedman and Thomas Bailey Aldrich, the famous critics, and several other literary celebrities, were appointed judges. Papers all over America gave notice of this contest. This carried the agitation and controversy through an additional period of a year, which made the total of unabated propaganda run to the unprecedented length of over two years. No poem in all literary history ever received such a launching.

John Vance Cheney won the prize for the best answer to "The Man With the Hoe." He is forgotten. Few who read this book will ever remember his name. But the great poem itself goes on forever, and the man who wrote it is known the world over.

Edwin Markham wrote to Cheney after his answer to "The Man With the Hoe" had been published, saying: "I have read your answer to my poem. It has real literary merit, but it is the most un-American poem I ever read—and the most un-Christian."

In this poem Cheney suggests that God made such human beings as "The Hoe-Man," and he made them for the rest of us to walk over. Mr. Markham rebelled at this philosophy of life. To-day the world agrees with him.

Joyce Kilmer said of Mr. Markham, "Edwin

Markham is our greatest living poet." Robert Underwood Johnson says, "A poem by Markham is a national event." Ella Wheeler Wilcox said, "Edwin Markham is the greatest poet of the century." The New York *Weekly Witness* said, "'The Man With the Hoe' set the whole world thinking and talking." The San Francisco *Chronicle* said, "No other poem in the world ever attracted so much attention as Edwin Markham's 'The Man With the Hoe.'" The London *Critic* said, "There is Edwin Markham's 'The Man With the Hoe'—no other poem ever swung so swiftly into the mouths of men from sea to sea." Madison Cawein said, "Edwin Markham's poem, 'The Man With the Hoe,' is worth all the rest of the poetry that has been written in America since the death of the Masters." Thomas Marshall, formerly Vice-President of the United States, said, "We who are standing here will pass into oblivion—we and all our works will vanish; but the name of Edwin Markham will echo down the centuries." Charles Edward Russell says: "Edwin Markham is the leader who gave us the greatest poem of the age—the most splendid of all utterances for man."

Recently the Hoe-poem has been called to public attention by Mark Sullivan, who in his history, *Our Times—The United States*, has devoted a chapter to the poem as an awakening social force at the dawn of the twentieth century. Here are some of the contents of his chapter:



Poem Written; Many people realize that the poet has expressed their thoughts; the country becomes excited; the poem is called "The Cry of the Zeitgeist;" a University President delivers a series of lectures on it.

The Saint Louis *Star*, in reviewing Mark Sullivan's volume, said:

"The most extraordinary phenomenon of the 'Mauve Decade' was a poem, 'The Man With the Hoe.' Edwin Markham, the author, who awoke one morning to find himself famous, has also found material success, critical approbation, a sudden frenzy of popular adoration, professional preferment, high official recognition. But in his reveries he must often live over again those wonderful days when his words were on every lip. The sensation he created is thus vividly recalled by Mark Sullivan in *Our Times*:

"The poem flew eastward across the continent like a contagion. As fast as the mails carried it, newspapers printed it as a fresh focus of infection—first California and the Pacific Coast, then the Mississippi Valley, on into New York and New England, over the line into Canada. Newspaper editions containing it were exhausted and publishers reprinted it, together with editorials about it, and also the hundreds of comments received from the reading public.

"A historian of that early day remarked the unique phenomenon that "the newspapers gave as

much space to 'The Man With the Hoe' as they gave to prize fights and police stories."

"The poem was hailed by many as "the battle-cry of the next thousand years." The *New York Herald* asked: "Is a revolution impending in America—a bloodless revolution this time, one fought not with bullets but with ballots? If so, Edwin Markham will prove to be at once its despised prophet and its accepted high priest.' "

"What a commotion that poem is making, not only in literary circles, but also in the broad arena of the world! Its ripples have not yet circled to the world's end; but nothing can stop the commotion when a stone is thrown into a lake—nothing can stop it until the ripples strike on the opposite shore.

"Newspapers are devoting a column editorial to 'The Man With the Hoe.' Reviewers are expatiating upon its quality. Paragraphers are turning out neat sentences upon its paradoxes. Women's clubs are debating the problem involved in the poem. Labor unions are resenting its imputations. Preachers are pointing their sermons with its moral. Indefatigable interviewers are adorning their tale of this poet with the philosophy of his ringing lines. Edwin Markham has certainly hit the bull's eye."

The friends of the Hoe-poem were everywhere greatly strengthened in spirit by the support of the distinguished pen of William Dean Howells. Great was his enthusiasm. Here is a fragment from his testimony:

"Edwin Markham is a poet of unquestionable gifts. His Hoe-poem has won him fame as wide as the continent and has created almost a literature about him. The words of the poem are mostly simple and strong and true. They are also volcanic. They pour a lava-tide of scorching questions from the soul of humanity upon the self-complacency of society. He has been hailed by his fellow citizens as easily the first living American poet."<sup>1</sup>

Out of the surging crowd came many other cries of approval. One of the many voices declared, "Edwin Markham's poem will outlive all criticism. It is the redeeming poem of the century."

Take these words also from J. I. C. Clarke, poet and critic and editor of *The Criterion*, the literary weekly of New York City: "Among the innumerable choir of songbirds comes a cry from the deeps, the cry in 'The Man With the Hoe.' Here is one of the old barbaric tongues of poetry, breaking the silence. It is a voice Dantesque in its terribleness, Miltonic in its vigor."

The Rev. D. MacLaughlin Therrell said in a long article: "The Hoe-poem is a towering protest against the dire oppressions of the working man; it is also a warning to the rulers of the existing order of things. The poem is the handwriting upon the wall of the ages, a friendly warning for the Belshazzars of our time."

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<sup>1</sup> Used by permission of Harper and Brothers, publishers.

William Jennings Bryan also entered the heated area. In his printed defense of the poem, he said:

"It is not strange that 'The Man With the Hoe' has created a profound sensation. It voices humanity's protest against inhuman greed. There is a majestic sweep to the argument: some of its lines pierce like arrows. How feeble in comparison have been the answers to it!

"The extremes of society are being driven farther and farther apart. Wealth is being concentrated in the hands of a few. At one end of the scale, luxury and idleness breed effeminacy; at the other end, want and destitution."

When the fame and appearance of this poem crossed the Atlantic, the *London Post* had this to say: "Edwin Markham has put into a living form the awakening social conscience of our age."

The poet himself has told just what he did and did not mean to say in his great social utterance. His statement has tremendous social significance for these days of depression:

"Of course the Hoe-man is not any man using a hoe. Thoreau hoes his bean field near Concord; and he says that when his hoe tinkled against the stones, the music echoed out to the woods and skies. Thoreau could gather two harvests—a material and also a spiritual harvest. Why? Because he had the upward looking and the light, and could hear in his soul the music and the dream.

"I saw that the Hoe-man is not Thoreau the



philosopher, nor is he the American farmer riding rosily on his reaper in the chromo.

"I realized as I looked that I was gazing on no mere man of the fields; but was looking on a plundered peasant, typifying the millions left over as the debris from the thousand wars of the masters, and from their long industrial oppressions extending over the ages.

"This Hoe-man might be a stooped consumptive toiler in a New York sweat shop; a man with a pick, spending nearly all his days underground in a West Virginia coal mine; a man with a labor-broken body carrying a hod in a London street; a boatman with strained arms and aching back rowing for hours against the heavy tide of the Volga.

"Nor had his battle been confined to his own life: it was a battle that extends backward through his long train of ancestry to a remote antiquity. He was the multitude that molded the bricks of ancient Egypt—the multitude that paved the Appian Way and lifted the massive blocks of the Pyramids—the multitude that fought for Timur and Attila, not knowing nor asking why, and then sank like the millions of raindrops into oblivion."

For the purpose of a better understanding of the life and spirit of Edwin Markham I have asked the poet's permission to quote "The Man With the Hoe," in spite of the fact that it is so widely known, and in spite of the fact that it is a part of every anthology of poetry published in the United States:

## THE MAN WITH THE HOE

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God  
created he him" (Genesis 1. 27).

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans  
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,  
The emptiness of ages in his face,  
And on his back the burden of the world.  
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,  
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,  
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?  
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?  
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?  
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?

Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave  
To have dominion over sea and land;  
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;  
To feel the passion of Eternity?  
Is this the Dream He dreamed who shaped the suns  
And marked their ways upon the ancient deep?  
Down all the caverns of Hell to their last gulf  
There is no shape more terrible than this—  
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed—  
More filled with signs and portents for the soul—  
More packt with danger to the universe.

What gulfs between him and the seraphim!  
Slave of the wheel of labor, what to him  
Are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?  
What the long reaches of the peaks of song,  
The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?  
Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;  
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;  
Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,  
Plundered, profaned and disinherited,  
Cries protest to the Judges of the World,  
A protest that is also prophecy.

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,  
 Is this the handiwork you give to God,  
 This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched?  
 How will you ever straighten up this shape;  
 Touch it again with immortality;  
 Give back the upward looking and the light;  
 Rebuild in it the music and the dream;  
 Make right the immemorial infamies,  
 Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,  
 How will the Future reckon with this Man?  
 How answer his brute question in that hour  
 When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?  
 How will it be with kingdoms and with kings—  
 With those who shaped him to the thing he is—  
 When this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world  
 After the silence of the centuries?

## CHAPTER VII

### "LINCOLN—THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE"

#### AN INTERPRETATION OF HIS INDIVIDUALISTIC PHILOSOPHY

AS it is true that Edwin Markham's social philosophy is concentrated in "The Man With the Hoe," so is it true that Markham's philosophy of individualism is expressed in "Lincoln—the Man of the People."

It is generally conceded by poets and critics alike that Markham's poem on Abraham Lincoln is the greatest utterance ever written on that great American martyr. It stands out as the Mount Everest of them all. Therefore, since it is conceded to be the greatest of the thousands of Lincoln poems, and since it is expressive of the individualistic philosophy of Edwin Markham, and one of the two poems by which he is known everywhere, one is able to trace through it, and particularly through its symbols and figure of speech, the whole sweep of the stream of the poet's subconscious life.

"The Man With the Hoe" was written in 1898 and "Lincoln—the Man of the People" was written in Brooklyn, New York, in 1899. Because of the popularity of the Hoe-man poem Mr. Markham had been called to the East from his California home



and had already become one of the great literary figures of the East.

It has been my pleasure to have two unusual experiences in relation to this great poem. First, I have had the story of its birth from the writer's own lips. I shall set the story down just as he told it to me. Second, I have had the adventure of probing his subconscious memory for most of the major figures of speech in this great poem. I shall also set that down in this chapter for whatever uses may be made of this information in years to come.

But, first, let us hear what the critics have had to say of this major creation of the poet's brain:

The concluding figure of this poem has been called by no less a poet than Alfred Noyes, "The most impressive climax in English poetry."

Dr. Henry van Dyke says of it: "Edwin Markham's 'Lincoln' is the greatest poem ever written on the immortal martyr, and the greatest that will ever be written." The *Book News* said, "Edwin Markham, undoubtedly stands first among contemporary poets; and his 'Lincoln' and his 'Man With the Hoe' will survive the wrack and ruin of time."

In 1922, as noted in a former chapter, when the Congressional Committee, headed by Chief Justice Taft, was looking for a Lincoln poem to be read at the dedication of the Memorial Temple to Lincoln, erected by the government in Washington, D. C., they unanimously chose Edwin Markham's poem as the one most powerful among the two

hundred and fifty great Lincoln poems now in existence. President Harding delivered the address; Edwin Markham read the poem. It was one of the first great broadcasts over the radio from Washington under government auspices, and while one hundred thousand people listened on the ground three million heard it over the radio.

Edwin Markham has written many Lincoln poems, including the "Lincoln Lyrics," which are beautiful in their interpretative power, but no poem of his equals this one in its understanding of the Lincoln character. The story of its creation, and the study that the poet made of Lincoln in order to write it, will be a further revelation of the stream of consciousness which flows through this great poet of the people.

With Mr. Markham's permission I retell this story mostly in his own words just as he told it to me for the purposes of this chapter.

Mr. Markham, following the remarkable success of his great social poem, was invited by a committee from the Republican Club of New York City to write a Lincoln poem to be read on the night of Lincoln's Birthday anniversary, February 12.

He said to that committee, "I'll give it to you if it is given to me."

There were only a few months in which to do the vast amount of reading that he wanted to do in preparation for the writing of the Lincoln poem, but with his usual pride of workmanship he began

a voluminous reading. He says that when he finally consented to give the poem to them, if it was given to him, that his heart leaped up, that he was intensely eager to pay homage to a truly great man, that his heart was all afire with the idea, and then he makes this striking comment on this type of poetry:

"Poetry is the daughter of God; and she rises into her high moments only when she is stirred by the heroic virtues of men—their unselfish devotions, their noble ambitions, their lofty achievements. In her high moments she comes keeping step with the music of humanity."

Then he gives a truly penetrating definition of that touch of greatness he saw in Lincoln:

"Lincoln was great not because he occupied the Presidential chair. The matter of importance is not the place a man fills, but how he fills it; not even the achievement of his life, but the spirit of his life. A man in public life, if he looks on his office as a mere instrument to give him power and glory, is only an empty shell. But if he keeps his petty ego suppressed and looks on his office as a fortunate instrument to enable him to serve the people, to establish justice, to increase good will, then his office becomes an altar of righteousness, a hiding-place of the Almighty. Lincoln belonged to this high order of men. I was thinking of him, as well as of Cromwell, when I wrote these lines in my poem, 'The Need of the Hour':

“ ‘What do we need to keep the nation whole,  
To guard the pillars of the state? We need  
The fine audacities of honest deed;  
The homely old integrities of soul;  
The swift temerities that take the part  
Of outcast right—the wisdom of the heart.  
We need the Cromwell fire to make us feel  
The common burden and the public trust  
To be a thing as sacred and august  
As the white vigil where the angels kneel.  
We need the faith to go a path untrod,  
The power to be alone and vote with God.’

“In 1847, five years before my birth, my tall, broad-shouldered father was the captain of a train of covered wagons that journeyed toward Oregon and the sundown seas, creeping out of the Abe Lincoln country, out of the awakening Middle West. Yes, even in that early day, my adventurous folk joined in the great historic march of the home-seekers, a march that rose to a new tide with the news of the wonders in the Far West, a march that was to end only on the ultimate shores of the continent.

“Five years after I had left my own dug-out log cradle in our cabin in Oregon City, within sound of the white wind-blown falls of the Willamette—even in that early time, Lincoln’s name began to be a household word in our pioneer circles.

“My people—always nonconformists and ‘come-outers’—were Abolitionists of course. So they followed with hot partisanship the famous Lincoln and Douglas debates in the late fifties, debates on the



problem of extending slavery into the free states. A little later—having moved to California as a child—I frequently heard the heated shibboleths of the time and caught the spirit of the national struggle.

"There was one word that swallowed up all other words—'copperhead.' To be called a copperhead, a Southern sympathizer, in those days, was to be ostracized, scorned, cast out, spat upon.

"I remember also how breathlessly my courageous mother watched the eloquent Starr King swing California for the Union.

"In 1861 and after—even in our hill-girdled cattle range in central California—I was old enough to hear the immense reverberation of the Civil War; and always the name of Lincoln sounded through that battle thunder as the deep hope-sustaining note of it all.

"When the terrible brother-battles were over and I was old enough to read history, I began to be familiar with young Lincoln's early struggles and triumphs. I saw in his early fortunes a counterpart of my own. Back of him I saw hardy pioneer ancestors, all similar to my own, as pictured by my mother in friendly fireside talks. They were woodsmen and raftsmen and surveyors and trail-makers, and I saw young Lincoln in the wilderness, helping to build log cabins, helping to cultivate the hard, resisting soil, helping to hew down the ancient forests.

"Soon I saw him as the tall, stalwart young rail-splitter, saw him in that rude cabin on the Sanga-

mon in wild Illinois—in that cabin with its clay floor, its log walls sealed with mud, its one window-hole covered with an apron, its huge fireplace with its flickering blaze of hickory logs. And I could see young Abe sprawled out before the flaming chimney, poring over his borrowed book or else ciphering on the smooth blade of his shovel.

“At a later period I saw him as lawyer, as politician, as President, always with his rugged yet glowing spirit, always lighted with humor, always sensitive to justice, always pleading for human rights, always vibrant with a tender mercy, a noble compassion.

“And now, in our own day, nearly seventy years after, Lincoln stands forth as the all-round man in our history, as the supreme man of the republic.

“And yet this immense personality had in him startling contrasts of experience. He won his path to place and power; and yet he lost precious and priceless things on the way—lost his wonder mother, Nancy Hanks, and his wonder sweetheart, Ann Rutledge.

“There were in him also startling contrasts of character. He had moments of great jovialities, Olympian laughters—had moments also of gigantic glooms, Tartarian melancholies. In this regard he was kindred to the great sons of genius, the great masters of literary expression—kindred to Shakespeare, whose dramas sparkle with humor and yet also breathe forth the still sad music of humanity;

kindred to Carlyle, whose prophetic pages shake with Rabelaisian laughs and also thunder with the prophecies of utter ruin for the world trampled by the blind hoofs of Mammon.

"Lincoln never lost hold upon the practical; he saw that common sense is the highest of all revelations. Yet he joined the men—scattered over the ages—the men who carry an unworldly ideal, the men who have hearts of great compassion, the men who are eager to extend social justice, the men who are willing to suffer for a great cause, the men who are willing to take unprofitable risks for unpopular truths. They are the souls who are in touch with the Higher Power, with the One who watches.

"These are the men who create in your breast the high poetic emotion. Hence at the name of Lincoln my heart leaped singing; and for no recompense, only for my love of this lofty soul, only for the joy of the doing, I promised the poem and plunged with passion into the task.

"The call came at the end of 1899, at the end of the nineteenth century. Four grave and reverend seniors, from a rich, exclusive New York club, knocked at my door in Brooklyn, my first home in the crowded East.

"I was told that their select company were about to have a Babylonian banquet at Delmonico's to celebrate the first Lincoln Birthday anniversary in the twentieth century. The rail-splitter whose early rations were slices of bacon and a hunk of corn

bread was now to be honored with a groaning banquet table at twenty dollars a plate.

"Would I have the grace and good will to write a Lincoln poem for the memorable occasion? I was assured that I had been chosen by the club from all the living American poets for this illustrious honor.

"Yes, I would be glad to pay my homage to greatness. Yet I told my callers that I had to go out lecture-reading, had to take an eagle-swing over the Middle West. But I would meditate upon the poem all the way, and would return in time to give three weeks to the composition.

"I remember that I said: 'Gentlemen, for Lincoln I have a deep love and reverence. I will wait patiently upon the Muse: if she gives the poem to me, I will give the poem to you. I cannot promise with certainty.' "

"Immediately on my return from the lecture-readings, I entered my study, plunged into meditation. I visualized Lincoln in the dramatic moments of his life. But nothing came to me out of the Invisible. Yet two immortal lines from Wordsworth swam into my mind:

'The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the poet's dream.'

"I crooned them over for an hour. Why this crooning? Simply in the hope of tuning the mind to a higher vibration, to that higher level where,



moved of old, was the consecrated soul of the great commoner. In that hour two or three phrases flashed out of the cloud of the mind, but the poem did not take form. The day ended with little or nothing accomplished.

"The next day also opened and closed with no poem, nor part of a poem. On the morning of the third day I took down from a favorite shelf a volume of Emerson, and read his essay on the great President. It did not awaken a great emotion; it did not kindle the eye of the imagination. That day also crumbled into nothingness. The next afternoon the anxious committee called on me for news. I told them that the Muse had not yet handed the poem down out of her mystery, but that I was hopeful, courageous, full of faith.

"Thus I kept on and on, pondering and waiting, determined not to yield an inch of ground to grim discouragement. Two weeks evaporated and were gone.

"Two days now remained before the dawn of the great day, before the fall of the great night, when I must rise in my place and read my ode to Lincoln under the glowing candelabra and among the stately presences of the rich and exclusive club in Manhattan. There is something witching and creative about the night hours; so I determined to sit up that night. I did so; I watched the stars away, but the Muse did not descend to me out of her secret place.

"Now only one more night remained. I slept all that day, and then began to watch away another night, the last night on the brink of the great banquet. At midnight, I opened my first volume, *The Man With the Hoe, and Other Poems*, and turned to 'The Desire of Nations,' where I prophesy the coming of the great social deliverer:

'He will arrive, our Counselor and Chief.  
And with bleak faces lighted up will come  
The earth-worn mothers from their martyrdom  
To tell him of their grief.  
And glad girls caroling from field and town  
Will go to meet him with the labor-crown,  
The new crown woven of the heading wheat.  
And men will sit down at his sacred feet;  
And he will say—the king—  
"Come, let us live the poetry we sing!"'

"I crooned these lines over, again and again. The heat of them penetrated me as a subtle fire, and seemed to dissolve the cold prose of the mind and let into it the music of the spheres.

"Out of this spherical music the Lincoln poem arose. For at two o'clock, the mystic hour of the morning, the deep hour when churchyards yawn and spirits walk abroad, in that mysterious hour the complete conception of the Lincoln poem came to me—the conception of Lincoln as the providential man sent into the world for a great crisis of his people, for a great service to the race.

"A creative idea flashed upon the long-waiting

abyss of the mind. I saw that the Norn Mother, the Divine Mother, the Creative Mother of the universe, must descend into the earth from the Heaven of Heroes to mold this man—not to mold him out of the scarce porcelain from which she makes aristocrats and kings, but out of the tried clay of the common road, out of the clay from which she makes the common people. I saw also that this man of the solid and homely earth must have in him the dear and fondly remembered qualities of the old earth, the labor-place and the resting-place of the countless generations of men. He must have in him the color of the ground, the smack and tang of things, the rectitude of the cliff, the good will of the rain, the welcome of the wayside well, the courage of the bird, the gladness of the wind, the pity of the snow, the secrecy of subterranean streams, the tolerance of the light.

"The poem had now leaped into its elemental form. I needed only to add a few details of the man's character, express his tragic ending, and the poem would be complete. In three hours the poem was finished, having been recopied three times, in my effort to revise and perfect the first draft. In another hour it was typewritten and on its way to the copyright office.

"I soon fell into a tranquil slumber, and at six-thirty in the evening I was at Delmonico's with the poem that had been handed down to me out of the hushed mystery and wonder of the night.

And when the poet foregathered with his fellows that memorable night in the now historic but demolished Delmonico Club, he read them a poem, which, in its brief compass of fifty-six lines, with a compactness like the acorn of an oak, has summed up the physical stature of Lincoln, the spirit of the great man, and the turbulent days into which he came:

LINCOLN—THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE

When the Norn Mother saw the Whirlwind Hour  
Greatening and darkening as it hurried on,  
She left the Heaven of Heroes and came down  
To make a man to meet the mortal need.  
She took the tried clay of the common road—  
Clay warm yet with the genial heat of Earth,  
Dashed through it all a strain of prophecy,  
Tempered the heap with thrill of human tears,  
Then mixed a laughter with the serious stuff.  
Into the shape she breathed a flame to light  
That tender, tragic, ever-changing face;  
And laid on him a sense of the Mystic Powers,  
Moying—all hushed—behind the mortal veil.  
Here was a man to hold against the world,  
A man to match the mountains and the sea.

The color of the ground was in him, the red earth;  
The smack and tang of elemental things;  
The rectitude and patience of the cliff;  
The good will of the rain that loves all leaves;  
The friendly welcome of the wayside well;  
The courage of the bird that dares the sea;  
The gladness of the wind that shakes the corn;  
The pity of the snow that hides all scars;  
The secrecy of streams that make their way  
Under the mountain to the rifted rock;



The tolerance and equity of light  
That gives as freely to the shrinking flower  
As to the great oak flaring to the wind—  
To the grave's low hill as to the Matterhorn  
That shoulders out the sky. Sprung from the West,  
He drank the valorous youth of a New World,  
The strength of virgin forests braced his mind,  
The hush of spacious prairies stilled his soul.  
His words were oaks in acorns; and his thoughts  
Were roots that firmly gripped the granite truth.

Up from log cabin to the Capitol,  
One fire was on his spirit, one resolve—  
To send the keen ax to the root of wrong,  
Clearing a free way for the feet of God,  
The eyes of conscience testing every stroke,  
To make his deed the measure of a man.  
He built the rail-pile as he built the state,  
Pouring his splendid strength through every blow:  
The grip that swung the ax in Illinois  
Was on the pen that set a people free.

So came the Captain with the mighty heart;  
And when the judgment thunders split the house,  
Wrenching the rafters from their ancient rest,  
He held the ridgepole up, and spiked again  
The rafters of the Home. He held his place—  
Held the long purpose like a growing tree—  
Held on through blame and faltered not at praise.  
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down  
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,  
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,  
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

Feeling that it would be of use and interest to  
students of Edwin Markham, if I were to sit with  
him from time to time, in a psychoanalytical mood,

and probe into his memories to discover from whence came the great figures of speech with which this poem is filled, I proposed as much to the poet and found him in a friendly and co-operative mood for such an adventure. I told him that in the years to come men would be interested in tracing the stream of his own consciousness, from boyhood to manhood through such an analysis. I felt that if we sincerely searched down deep into his subconscious mind, we might be able to find the source and inspiration of the figures of speech and the exquisite lines of this great poem.

I first asked him if he could tell me what had suggested that great figure, descriptive of Lincoln's stalwart stature and spirit, "The rectitude and patience of the cliff?" After a few moments of silent introspection his eyes flashed light and he said:

"That figure was suggested to me by a memory of my very earliest boyhood days. I was born under a great cliff in Oregon City, and the early memory which clings most tenaciously is the memory of that vast perpendicular rock soaring upward until it is lost in the clouds. When I searched my subconscious mind for a figure to interpret the beautiful patience, the honor and integrity of Lincoln; and also his stalwart physical figure, out of the past from as far back as seven years of age, flashed that figure."

Then I was curious to know about that great figure of speech with which he describes Lincoln's

democracy and kindness; his good will toward all men; that which made somebody say of him that "Lincoln's heart was as big as the world but there was no room in it for the memory of a single wrong"; that which made him forgive and forget his meanest critics; that which made him sympathize with the slave-owners as well as the slaves: "The good will of the rain that loves all leaves."

His answer was: "That rose out of my memories of the Suisun Hills—when, while a cowboy on my mother's cattle range, I was caught frequently in some flurry of rain which scattered its bright drops on all leaves of all trees on the encircling hills. The cedars, and oaks, and sycamores, all sparkling with raindrops. That was a memory never to be forgotten."

Then I wanted to know about that glorious and unusual line: "The friendly welcome of the wayside well."

His answer was filled with laughter, the laughter of a boy:

"You are wondering whether I had a memory of some wayside well when I wrote that line. I certainly did. It was a well I knew in my boyhood. It was near the old redwood schoolhouse where 'The Enchanter' came into my life. The well was just a little way from the school and the teacher would let some of us boys go and draw water in an old oaken bucket for the children. It was an open well, with a pulley, moss-covered lining of rocks, a

wooden bucket and an old gourd cup. Sometimes when we went to that well to get water for the school, a drove of cattlemen would come by and we would be asked to draw water for them. That took a long time, and necessitated being away from the school for an hour, 'a consummation devoutly to be wished' by a ten-year-old boy. That wayside well has always seemed to me to be about the most friendly place I have ever known, where weary travelers could stop to quench their thirst on a hot day. It was that old well that came back, flashing into my memory when I searched for a figure of speech which would interpret the universal friendliness of Lincoln: 'The friendly welcome of the wayside well.' Ah! That's it!"

"Now tell me about that vigorous figure: 'The courage of the bird that dares the sea,' " I requested.

"After leaving my mother's cottage on the cattle range in the Suisun Hills I spent two years in the Teacher's College in Oakland; and I frequently journeyed out to the old Cliff House, where I would watch the sea gulls flying out to sea. I felt the courage of their daring flight. I frequently saw among the birds over the sea a stormy petrel taking its venturesome flight over the waste of whitening waves."

Then I asked him about that figure of the glad heart of Lincoln and whence it came: "The gladness of the wind that shakes the corn." Quick as a flash his answer came:



"The corn figure was another memory of my boyhood on my mother's farm in California. In those early days I plowed and planted acres and acres of corn; and it was a great joy to note the tasseling of the stalks and to watch the sudden leap of the long swordlike leaves when the glad wind rushed over the green and happy fields. The beauty of the scene had thrilled my young heart a thousand times."

One of the most perfectly interpretative figures of speech in the poem is that figure, descriptive of the pity of Lincoln: "The pity of the snow that hides all scars."

Then the poet launched into a compact but comprehensive story of the gold-mining days in California. After his college education, as we have seen in a preceding chapter, he was called to El Dorado County to become the superintendent of schools. This county was in the Sierras, in the heart of the gold country. The first stage of the gold era in California was when they found their gold in the gravel of the streams. This they "panned" from the water. The second stage of the gold era was when they hurled great streams of water against the hillsides and across the fields and washed the earth away, later to gather the gold in nuggets, and grains. The third stage is the present stage, where they go down deep into the earth with great shafts somewhat as coal is mined. It was during the second period of mining by hydraulic force that great

scars were left against the hills. Those scars still remain and may be seen to this day. Mr. Markham says this about that process: "Strangely enough, that wild territory in El Dorado County was frightfully scarred by the miners in the early mining era. Sometimes a whole hillside was swept away by hydraulic power. Winter freshets also left their deep and enduring scars. But at the first fall of snow all of these ugly scars were mercifully covered and the world was beautiful again; all ugly features and fissures were hidden by the pity of the snow. That seemed to me to sum up the pity of Lincoln: 'The pity of the snow that hides all scars.' "

"Now, Mr. Markham, what about:

'The secrecy of streams that make their way  
Beneath the mountain to the rifted rock' "?

The answer was fascinating and enlightening:

"Many times in my early outdoor life I have come upon streams, which suddenly disappeared, ran underground for a mile or so, and then suddenly reappeared. You must know that the stream that forms the Sacramento River has its beautiful source from the melting snows of Mount Shasta; that it runs underground for twenty or more miles, and that then it suddenly leaps out of its underground passage into a great and beautifully clear spring of crystal water. It is this spring that forms the source of the Sacramento River which flows through the Sacramento Valley, which was my boyhood

home, and thence to the Pacific. I used to sit on a high hill, as a boy, looking down upon that great rich valley. When I desired to interpret the strange, silent secrecy of Lincoln, that enigmatic something about him which made him hold his peace against all the world; that characteristic about him which was almost Old World diplomacy in his makeup; which gave him power to keep his own counsel until the great hour for revelation came; then I remembered that deep-hidden, secret river which forms the Sacramento and my figure came to me."

"Now for

'The strength of virgin forests braced his mind,  
The hush of spacious prairies stilled his soul' "?

Answered the poet with a far-away look in his haunting eyes, as if he were once again walking beneath those virgin sequoias and redwoods of his native California and Oregon; as if he once again were far away from my study walking across those Western prairies he loves to roam:

"Those lines arose out of my memories. I lived all of my days among the vigorous mountain forests of the West—among oaks, redwoods, sequoias, cedars. The prairie figure was suggested to me by the memory I have of the long, silent leagues of prairie that I saw in crossing the American continent."

There is one figure of speech in the Lincoln poem which has been called the greatest figure of all

literature, without doubt the most terrific climactic figure of speech that has ever been written on these American shores, and that figure is the last line in the poem, when Markham describes the death of Lincoln, as like a great cedar which goes down in a storm: "And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."

It is worthy any man's literary labor to find out for all time whence came that striking figure, that classical climax of the greatest poem ever written on Abraham Lincoln. His answer is worthy of being preserved in permanent form:

"This figure of the falling tree was suggested to me by a hundred experiences in my romantic boyhood. Many times when looking for lost cattle in the mountains a wild tempest suddenly shook the earth; and I would seek shelter under some live oak tree through whose dense leaves no rain can penetrate. On several of these occasions I have seen a mighty tree give way before the rushing hurricane, and fall with a great shout upon the hills; and whenever I passed that way again where the tree had fallen, I always saw 'a lonesome place against the sky.' Every tree on those mountains was my friend, was dear to my heart; so when one was hurled prostrate, I could not help but see with wistful heart the vacant place against the heavens.

"In the first draft of the poem, as it was read at the banquet, this last line was not inserted. But Mrs. Markham—who was also a mountaineer and



who had often seen these ‘lonesome places’—urged me to add the line, for she also had seen a tree fall near her childhood home, leaving a lonesome gap in the forest ranks.

“Yes, Lincoln went down in tragic death, but he is even greater in his death than he ever was in his life. For he has risen to become the national ideal, the great spiritual power kindling a great people.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### "THE BALLAD OF THE GALLOWS BIRD"

#### AN INTERPRETATION OF HIS PHILOSOPHY OF THE LIFE HEREAFTER

A GREAT wood-fire is gleaming across the library. Immortal books look down on us as we talk quietly in the shadows. The poet is telling me the story of his greatest ballad, "That Gallows Bird," as he calls it.

As the story begins he sits slumped in a great easy chair, but as his soul takes fire with the narrative, he rises from his chair, and for an hour walks the floor like some Jovian giant hurling thunderbolts across the world. He lives once again on that bleak hill where the man he calls his "hero" hangs between "two blasted trees." He walks once again with his own feet down that long labyrinth into the abyss, walks like some Dante into the nethermost hell, into that hell which is so much like our own world; into that waste of hate and horror. He bends over my chair as I write down in shorthand what he says. His own eyes flash with such a light as I have never seen in any man's eyes. This white-haired old saint seems to be incarnate Satan himself, so real is this story to his dramatic soul.

He bends over the back of a big plush chair in

which I sit and the beams of the library fire light up his face, which is so close to mine that I can feel his breath as he talks, interpreting his own version of this Gallows Bird.

"It was nine years brewing in my soul," he said.

"I've always had it in my mind, at least for forty years; had it in my mind to write something that would sweep in the spiritual world and my conception of the adventure and destiny of the human soul beyond the doors of death.

"I have two thousand lines written on that projected epic, but since the completion of that epic seems to have been delayed, I decided to write a shorter poem in rimed ballad form to express my conception of the darker or lower side of the spiritual universe.

"Swedenborg and other great seers say that the next plane of life is similar to this plane here in the third dimension. He says, indeed, that the spiritual world is only the soul of this physical world, the living, substantial reality behind this physical world, or shell. Behind physical form is a spiritual form and that is the soul.

"The soul is an organism of vital, enduring structure, more vital and more enduring than the physical body.

"When a man rises out of the physical form at death he undergoes what is called the resurrection. This takes place at death, not thousands of years in the future.

"At death he rises out of the grave of the body. That is what the Bible means when it talks of men rising from the grave.

"The seers also tell us that so merciful and beautiful is the transition into the next existence that many persons rise at death without knowing what has happened for a long time after they are dead. They think, for a while, that they have simply waked up in the old world of the physical earth. Things look familiar around them. They see mountains and rivers; and come in contact with friendly people. Therefore, I have my hero in this poem murder a man. Soon after this murder he is seized by the Vigilantes and hanged to a beam, stretched between two blasted trees. He loses consciousness for a time; then comes to life again and finds that he has escaped from the hangman's noose. He thinks that by some trickery he has outwitted the Vigilantes; when, in fact, he is dead and does not realize it. When he comes to he is in the next plane of existence after death, and is on the brink of a new adventure.

"When a man is dead, he is still exactly the same as he was before. He has the same hopes, fears, nobilities, frailties. So my hero thinks at once that he must escape the Vigilantes, who will seize and hang him again. So he lifts up the dead body of the man he has murdered; the spiritual body; throws it over his shoulders and strikes out across country intending to bury the body in the sea.



‘I lay in wait till he reached the rock  
And then I dirked him dead,  
And left a blood-drip on the road,  
A scribble of rusty red.

‘For a hundred sleepless years the feud  
Had leaped from sire to son,  
The blood-lust burning hot in our hearts,  
And now the war was won.

‘No more should I be forced to see  
That carcass glower and gloat—  
Nor see the snake in his eye, nor hear  
The jackal in his throat.

‘So as I hurled him into death  
My glad hate gave a yell;  
For I knew his deeds had dug his name  
In the iron Book of Hell.

‘And now on the old abandoned road  
Where many a man had bled,  
I was stamping out the new blood-marks,  
The scribble of rusty red,  
When a horde of men stormed down the glen,  
And doom was in their tread.

‘With mongrel howls and tiger scowls,  
They beat me to my knees:  
They spiked on high a gallows-beam  
Between two blasted trees.  
There came a crash of curses, then  
A rope, . . . a wrenching twist, . . .  
And I was floating away, away,  
Into a world of mist.

‘Ages I seemed to swirl and swirl,  
Like driftwood on a sea;  
And then I came to life again,  
And all was well with me!

'I had seen the lynchers crowd the road,  
Had heard their yells condemn.  
But now I had slipped from the strangling rope:  
I had outwitted them!

'Twas joy to see the dark boughs shake  
Against the evening red;  
To see the birds go, one by one,  
To their high nests overhead;  
To sense the old familiar earth  
And know I was not dead.

'To drink the air was wonderful,  
To smell the ground was good;  
*And it was comforting to hear  
The nightjar in the wood.*

'So into the night I carried my load  
With slow unsteady tramp;  
While over the hell-black clouds a moon  
Was holding a ghostly lamp.

'On, on I strode to the brink of voids,  
Where suddenly I came  
On a mighty gateway in a wall,  
Which must have had old fame.  
Carved on the cross-bar overhead,  
There gloomed a word could not be read—  
A half-obliterated name.  
The gate's vast shadow on the night  
Looked like a gallows' frame.

'Like some huge cromlech rose the shafts,  
Prodigious in their girth—  
Rose, ruined by the winds and rains  
Of ages old as earth;  
And high on the pillars were cryptic words  
In crumbling letters held—  
Words chiseled there by unknown powers  
Of mystery and eld.

'The seven that had eluded Time,  
I read from a rocky shelf:  
'Be hard!' Then thundered the final five:  
'Each man for himself!'

"He cannot read the inscription over this massive gate; so he climbs up one of the stupendous pillars, climbs over on the arch, and digs the dust of time out of the letters until he can read it. The words are:

'Choice Is the Hinge of Fate!'

Then this venerable poet, wise with long years of pondering the problems of time and eternity; especially, in these sunset years, the problems of the life after death, repeats that startling phrase, which his hero digs out of the dust of time: "Choice Is the Hinge of Fate!" and turns and says, slowly, reverently: "A man, in life or death, goes down into the abyss of annihilation, or up to the peaks of spiritual glory by the choices he makes, wherever he is; more by his choices than by any other single thing in all the long journey of life. If he chooses to take the low road, and chooses that deliberately and continuously, he is headed for soullessness. If he chooses the high road, he is headed for Truth and God.

"If he has the spirit of 'Be hard!' and 'Each man for himself,' which is the antithesis of the social feeling; he will soon find himself an outcast from humanity, either in this life or the life to come, for

there is social need over there as well as here. And, finally, if he persists in that philosophy, that anti-social feeling, his soul will die, for does not the Scripture say: 'The soul that sins, that soul shall die?'"

The good gray poet was talking, both like a prophet and like a preacher; but his philosophy of the here and the hereafter was convincing. He continued in the half-light:

"On the road he is met by three tall and beautiful beings who invite him to join them in the loves and labors of the higher life. This is the appeal of Heaven, an appeal that comes to every soul that passes over the Great Divide. He rejects the appeal, for he is drawn by some mysterious cord toward the great Abyss of Hell, where there are millions of people, living the reckless, foolish, and superficial life.

"Strangely enough, as he searches the tracks in the dust the lost soul does not find any children or any young laughter on this path downward into the last Abyss of the Soul; nor does he find any footsteps coming back. There is no redemption for the soul in the Hereafter when he chooses the downward path to the Abyss.

"In spite of this warning he starts down the winding road into the mighty Abyss beyond, and as he goes, some mystic hand plucks at his garment thrice; another warning; but he plunges on:



'I saw, yet I dared the roads ahead:  
 Strangely they did entice.  
 I swung down canyons that seemed to be  
 A ruined paradise;  
 Yet something trying to hold me back  
 Plucked at my garment thrice.

'But I heeded not the cryptic sign;  
 For I felt my spirit leap,  
 As I heard far voices calling me,  
 Like music heard in sleep—  
 Far voices calling, calling me  
 To join them in the deep.'"

'Yet over it all my own made call;  
 So on I carried my pack—  
 On, on I tramped, although I saw,  
 In the grime of the trodden track,  
 Thousands of footprints going down,  
*But saw none coming back.*

'And searching the marks in the dust, I found  
*No footprint of a child;  
 Nor ever heard on that lonesome road  
 Young laughter light and wild.*

'Night deepened, and a strange wind stirred  
 The boughs with mournful gust;  
 And in some lonely wood I heard  
 An owl forebode the dust.'

"He comes into contact, as he winds down the circuitous road, with many wayside orators, who are teaching the people a wild and reckless philosophy. He comes finally to a great city where people are living a reckless and ruinous life, where on one hand are the select gentlemen and ladies—dominating the masses and living upon them; whereas,

on the other side are the hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken multitudes. Indeed, it is just like any Christian city on the earth. Churches appear on every hand. But there is none of the consecration and holy sacrifice of the Divine Christ in them. Hell is full of churches.

'Strange crowds were scattered along the way,  
Each drifting to his own,  
Wild fancies flashing from their brains  
With jeer and laugh and groan.

'I saw nine beggars under a cliff:  
Each, on his separate stone,  
Stood boasting of his kingly realm  
And of his golden throne!

'And under other cliffs were crowds  
Babbling with loud ha-hahs.  
From a shelving rock a reasoner cried:  
"The God-fear has no cause":  
The "Black coats" try to set you quaking,  
But evil is only good in the making.  
Sin? We have pulled her claws:

"Their Jah has no avenging God—  
Her laws the only laws."  
A listening host stood under his spell,  
And gaped their long applause.

'At last he cried: "Behold—'tis day!  
Light has dispelled the fears.  
You need no battling soul, I say:  
Up to the Higher Spheres!"

'Another reasoner from a rock  
Shouted the name Voltaire,  
And cried: "There is no other world,  
There is no Over There."

'His logic flashed with light: I knew  
 The truth of every thrust:  
 I knew that the dead are *dead*, that men  
 Rise never from the dust.

. . . . .  
 'And then I came to shattered shapes  
 On roads they did not know:  
 They could not see their way, nor name  
 The place they had to go.  
 For all were blind, and with blind hands  
 They searched the empty air,  
 As if to find a friendly door,  
 A door that was not there.' "

What a terrific symbol of the lost souls of the abyss; the lost souls who chose, deliberately, the downward path to annihilation of the beautiful, the pure, the holy. But even that terrific picture of lostness is surpassed by a cry from "The Oldest Shape":

"'Ever we sought out happiness,  
 A frail, sea-going band.  
 We ventured every wind that blew  
 Toward rock or reef or sand;  
 Till we all went down on a floating wreck,  
 A wreck we took for land!"

"My hero rushes on. Presently he comes to a street where the harlots are out picking up the men. One old harlot tells her life story to him, tells of how she has at last, in that dark downward path, which she has taken by choice, come to the place where she cannot sleep even in the kennels of the dogs:

'That night I walked a roaring town,  
Where all were pleasuring, king, and clown.  
Spewed out of every den,  
The scarlet girls, in whispering skirts,  
Were picking up the men,  
With laugh of twisted mirthless mouth  
And leer of loveless eyes.  
One offered to me her painted lips,  
The kiss that money buys;  
And made the secret Cyprian sign,  
The signal lewd and bold,  
Which even in Sodom was old.

'One skinny hag, a wreck of wrecks,  
A harlot withered out of sex,  
Was squat upon the ground,  
Her fingers twitching at her skirts  
In never-ceasing round.  
Now staggering to her worn-out feet,  
She blinked a watery eye  
And pointed with a shaking hand  
And piped a quavering cry:

'“Once I was young and happy as they;  
My head was high, my gowns were gay.  
Gallants came riding in golden coats,  
With jewels at their ruffled throats.  
Ha, still they're fastened to my chain:  
I keep them riding in my brain!  
Whew, but these fools, these nibbling mice,  
Take anything that has the price!  
Ho, ho, but I came high—  
Not every passer-by!  
Once I had silk-embroidered beds, . . .  
Now with the dogs I lie,  
And all men turn away their heads.  
Not even a hooted slave  
Will take me now, for whom a king  
One time a kingdom gavel”'



"The hero flees onward and suddenly comes to a vast area where the workmen are hewing mighty stone pillars to build palaces and mansions for these rich nabobs and grandees, who rule Hell with an iron rod.

"In many ways it is similar to what we call our modern civilization.

"This is the upper and more normal realm of Hell. But there are deeper and more abnormal realms toward which these tribes in the upper realms are continually drifting, after they lose the centrality of their intellects and become haunted with illusions. At a later time these poor sons and daughters of illusion lose their hold upon life itself and crumble away into the mercy of the dust and everlasting annihilation.

"So that God's mercy is there even at the roots of Hell.

"All down the long winding ways to the floor of the abyss our hero passes great cliffs and lofty boulders on which are written warnings. He heeds them not.

"After reaching the bottom of the abyss he strikes out across a wide stretch of sand where there are millions of graves. It is indeed the graveyard of Hell. As he plods onward terrific tempests rise and lift thousands of skeletons out of their graves, and they go dancing together across the mighty plain; the plain of tombs.

"Finally the hero decides to return home to his

mountain cabin where he had left his girl. All this time he had not come to the consciousness that he was dead. When he reaches, at last, the old abandoned road in the high mountains where he had killed his enemy, it is night—dark night. But at last the lightnings begin to fill the heavens and all the mountains on every hand are lighted up; so that, when he reaches the gallows between two blasted trees, he sees his hound lying in the shadow of the gallows, and the hound leaps to his feet at his master's approach and runs away.

"The hero pauses to look at the gallows before him, outlined in flashes of lightning, and, to his astonishment, he sees a man swinging from the gallows-beam. He also sees two ravens perched upon the dead man's head, thrusting their beaks in through the eye-openings into the brain. Presently they draw their beaks from out of his brain:

'And now my nearing steps disturbed  
The ravens at their feast,  
There where the dead man swung in the wind  
With sound that never ceased.  
For they drew their heads from out his brain  
(Still did the swung rope creak)  
And little crumbs of carrion  
Clung to each happy beak.

'And now they whetted their beaks with care  
Upon the gallows beam;  
Then slowly turned their knowing eyes  
Upon me with a gleam.

'A sudden gust, and the strangled shape,  
That humped and dangling thing,  
Wheeled round its face, with holes for eyes . . .  
'Twas I that hung against the skies:  
'Twas I on the rope a-swing!

"Awed and bewildered, shivering with terror my  
hero looked suddenly around as if something pur-  
sued him from behind the hills of death; and, as  
he looked, a wild wind struck his dangling body and  
it whirled again, revealing the face of the dead man;  
and, to his terror, he is confirmed in that terrible  
thought and spectacle:

'It was my own, own body I saw  
A-swing in the spectral night:  
It was my own, own body I saw  
Fade slowly from my sight.  
And with it faded the hills of home  
And all my life's delight!

'Then a sudden shout crashed into my brain,  
The truth on my spirit fell. . . .  
God of my soul! I was *dead*, . . . and *damned*, . . .  
And tramped the roads of hell!'"

The poet relaxed when he was through with this  
weird story of his new poem in my library. The  
fires had died low. Neither of us had thought to  
replenish the fuel. The room was growing chilly.  
I could not tell whether it was actually the cold  
winter night outside which had crept into the  
library or a chill wind blowing in from the waste  
of tombs which he had described so vividly, the  
chill wind which had swung the dead body of his

hero into the lightning flash. It was after midnight. The house was still. The poet was exhausted with his recital. It had been so terribly real to him; this story of a soul's struggle to survive as a spiritual entity in hell; this tall tale of a murderer who had gone to hell, who had had his choice of good or evil; this soul who had seen all evidences of the fact that a soul may be annihilated if it continually chooses evil; this soul that had passed through all the stages of hell, and had come back to his hills of home to find that after all he was dead and not alive.

The poet slumped into the great chair and was in the chalklike pallor of a deep repose. It was as though he had actually lived through all that his "Hero," as he called the "Gallows Bird," had suffered of fright and terror and annihilation. I was awed to silence. Then I knew why it was that Edwin Markham had written "The Ballad of the Gallows Bird" over a period of nine years, doing all of that work between the hours of midnight and one o'clock over this long period, one hour every night. Then I began to understand why it had been that through all of those years, when he was visiting our home in Detroit, Kansas City, and elsewhere, that every night after we had all gone to bed, I could hear the poet tramping about in his room; could hear him chanting softly to himself as some stricken, condemned man chants to himself in his cell at night. For years during the writing



of this great ballad the poet had visited in our home a month at a time, and one of the strange phenomena of his visits had been that midnight to morning wakefulness. We had not dared to talk about it for fear of embarrassing the poet. Night after night he kept us awake. He would walk through the halls and even into the bedrooms, half-lost, half-haunted with the woes of his hell-bound hero, fresh from the hangman's noose. We often talked about it among ourselves in Detroit, where much of the writing on this poem was done. Sometimes it frightened us, particularly our child, but now we understand that the poet was living and writing his haunting lines of "The Ballad of the Gallows Bird" during those nocturnal vigils with the Muse. That explained much of the mystery in this humble household.

After hearing the weird story of that great poem, and after reading it, I do not wonder that when Charles Hanson Towne, himself no mean poet, read "The Gallows Bird," it haunted him also. He wanted it for *McClure's Magazine*, of which he was an editor, but the backers of that now defunct magazine were afraid to publish such a long and such a weird poem. But Mr. Towne wrote asking if he might let Mr. Mencken, of the *American Mercury*, see the poem.

Mr. Mencken read it and wrote the poet, saying that it had haunted him; that he would like to publish it, but that it was too long for him, and sent

it back to Mr. Markham. A week later the poet received another letter saying: "I can't get that damned thing out of my head. It haunts me like a ghost in the belfry. Send it over and I'll publish it in the next issue."

It was published in the August issue of the *Mercury* in 1926 and letters began to pour in on the poet. One came from George Sterling, the California poet, who said that it was one of the four great ballads of all time, and that it equaled *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. George Sylvester Viereck said that the passage about the ravens eating the brains of the hero was the most terrific passage in all literature.

One cannot claim to know Edwin Markham, the stream of his growing consciousness, his philosophy on the life after death; his thoughts on Spiritism, on heaven and hell and immortality; on the possibilities of soul-annihilation and soul growth in the hereafter, until he has read, "The Ballad of the Gallows Bird," which will appear in his *Collected Poems* in the near future and which is now available in the August, 1926, number of *The American Mercury*, a copy of which may be obtained in libraries. Edwin Markham's own estimate of this poem—and that estimate is backed by discriminating critics—is that it will live as his greatest poem, even beyond the life of "The Man With the Hoe."

## CHAPTER IX

### "WHY STANDS HE FORTH SO STATELY AND SO TALL?"

#### AN INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS IN HIS LIFE

"Why does he make our hearts so strangely still,  
Why stands he forth so stately and so tall?  
Because he has no self to serve, no will  
That does not seek the welfare of the All."<sup>1</sup>

JUST outside of Geneva, Switzerland, there is a striking conjunction of two rivers, the Arve and the Rhone.

The Arve is a dull, grayish, lead-colored body of water. The Rhone, which flows from glacial snows and mountain waters, is of a deep indigo blue. Where they meet they are as sharply divided as if some huge giant had cleaved them into two parts of different hues. This division is as clear cut as if a line of wire had been run through them. These two waters run side by side in the same bed for miles, clearly distinct, as if they were two rivers instead of one, but before they reach the low bridges of Geneva they have mingled their waters and have become one clear, blue-green sweep of widening and whirling water.

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<sup>1</sup> "Christus," from *Eighty Songs at Eighty*.

So, in the life and the consciousness of Edwin Markham two rivers meet—the spiritual and the social. He is a strange combination of the pragmatic and the idealistic; of the earth and the cloud; of the valley waters and the mountain streams. He is intensely businesslike, but just as intensely poetical in his thoughts and expressions. “Bread, Beauty and Brotherhood” is the theme of his philosophy.

Seldom, if ever, will one meet a man who, with so many engagements, misses so few of them; who is never late to an appointment; and who is so insistent upon accuracy. Seldom will one meet a man who is so thoughtful of the personalities and the affairs of others. He considers it a crime against personality to monopolize any conversation, or to steal a man’s time by being late in meeting engagements. Yet he has a sense of timelessness.

He is as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove; yet he can also be exacting and demanding, when a moral or an ethical principle is at stake.

He seems to live in a world of dreams, and yet try to check him on a chance phrase which has been uttered in a conversation a month ago, and his mind will flash it back with perfect accuracy.

He is irregular in his hours, almost as irregular as the actor; for he sleeps from two in the morning until noon, and yet with all of his irregularity, when one watches him a year through, he finds that the poet lives with a clocklike regularity in his own



way and in his own world. It simply means that he does not conform—but that he has worked out his own way in his own universe.

When one has the privilege of watching the poet over a period of years, he finds that the practical and the idealistic; the mundane and the mystical, like the two rivers which I have mentioned, finally meet and mingle and flow on in a great, sweeping blue-green stream of beauty, worship, and reverence: reverence for personality, for truth, for beauty, for God. In a few words, although Mr. Markham, like Lincoln, does not now belong to any church, he is deeply and intensely religious, as even a casual perusal of his great religious poetry will prove.

We shall study the stream of his religious consciousness through his own statement of his religious belief, through the influence of Emmanuel Swedenborg, and through the intimate story of his life-long search for God. As Thomas Carlyle once said, the chief thing about a man is his religion; and until we know what a man thinks and believes about religion and God we do not know that man.

Edwin Markham has always been a thinker, a philosopher. He has not been one to accept the universe without penetrating into its meaning and mysteries; without asking questions of it. He thinks his conclusions through to the ultimate.

He thinks as well as feels. There is no single thing more characteristic of the man than the fact

that he will sit all day and talk with any man who is capable of discussing with him the philosophic background of life. Any friend will soon note that he runs with eagerness to such a man. He likes to sit for hours and talk over the universe, time and eternity; to look behind the veil, to try to penetrate the mysteries of existence. I should say that the meaning of life absorbs his mind; and has always absorbed his mind, more even than his livelihood or his poetry. He will sit all day and all night talking theology or philosophy. If he had not been a poet, he would have been a teacher—as, indeed, he was in the early years of his life.

He loves more than anything else to get a crowd of students about him to discuss with them the meaning of life and immortality. I have had much testimony from these students to the effect that they get a clearer meaning of life, religion, and immortality from these chance seminars with the poet than they get from their classes or their teachers. It is no uncommon thing to lose sight of him and find him surrounded by students discussing the eternal mysteries and verities. This is his habitat—the world of religion and philosophy.

I have asked him many times what life and eternity really mean to him, and I am able to bring his answer in his own words and in no quibbling terms. When I have asked him such questions, invariably and with an eager and enthusiastic effort to co-operate, he has answered in the following manner:

"When I was a boy I often stood on a mountain top, high above the Pacific, looking down and away into the interminable distances and wondering over the world and its mystery. I was then a shy lad, herding a flock of sheep among gray crags and green uplands. Now, after fifty years on my island facing the Atlantic, I am still looking into the vast fading horizons, still, as of old, wondering, unsatisfied over life and its inexplicable meanings. The only difference between the boy and the man is that the man finds more mystery than the boy ever dreamed of. The boy was touched with a sense only of the world-mystery, while the man has added to that a sense of the unintelligible mystery of existence."

What a majestic sweep backward that statement gives us—back from the eighty-year-old philosopher and poet, the mature, the fully developed mind, the full-flowing stream of one man's consciousness; back to the boy shepherd on the Suisun Hills of California. What a sweep, from a boy mystified by a physical world beyond the horizons, to a spiritual world beyond the cosmos! And yet that eighty-year-old mind is not fearful; is still optimistic and adventuring. Hear the opening poem of his *Eighty Songs at Eighty* and catch the courage of this way-faring, spiritual pilgrim facing the great to-morrow:

"I am done with the years that were: I am quits:  
 I am done with the dead and old.  
 They are mines worked out: I delved in their pits:  
 I have saved their grain of gold.

"Now I turn to the future for wine and bread:  
I have bidden the past adieu.  
I laugh and lift hands to the years ahead:  
'Come on: I am ready for you!'"

In spite of the fact that he is baffled in his thinking by the mysteries of life, he is unafraid of the future.

His ancestry, as we have seen, had in it a long line of physical, geographical, and spiritual pioneers. His "Roman mother" was always trying to penetrate the mysteries of the past. We have seen her with a ten-year-old boy at her knees trying to understand the hidden mysteries and meanings of the ancient Babylonian and Egyptian life; particularly the religious cults and movements. The pyramids fascinated her, and hence fascinated the boy. He was suckled at the breast of religious research. He himself says:

"I am descended from a people given to spiritual peering and pondering. So there came a day when my young soul began to seek anxiously for the unifying principle of life. I found myself in a chaos of creeds and doubts. My reason rejected their petty schemes of salvation and their crude guesses at God. It was a glad moment when, after many stumblings, I came to see that the idea of humanity is the core of religion, the core of the spiritual fact. It was easy then to see that fraternity in action is the holiest of all ideas—is the spirit of the Gospels and the fulfillment of all revelations. These trium-



phant convictions sponged out the old billboards of religion, pasted with lifeless catchwords and faded labels, and swept away, at one stroke, long rows of sawdust effigies that had been set up to serve as signposts and milestones on the path of life. The 'Hebrew old clothes' of religion, serviceable in their day, perhaps, were carted away to the dust-heap; and little was left but the radiant indignation of Isaiah and the martyr-love of Jesus."

Some might call this Humanism, but Markham is not a Humanist. True enough, he has ceased to live in the religion of the Old Testament, as that statement makes clear. Long since has he distanced that slow stride; long since has he disregarded, as he says, all but "the radiant indignation of Isaiah," to live in "the martyr-love of Jesus." No, Edwin Markham is no Humanist, although he has ever been a battler for human rights. He is heart and soul a Christian; a follower of Jesus, a believer in "the hidden purposes of Jesus."

"But enough was left to make it clear," he adds, "clear as light that genuine Christianity is the final religion, resting upon the impregnable rock of the humanitarian principle. I became a believer in the person and the politics of Jesus. And now I see in him the supreme Statesman and Lawgiver of nations. His words are all in the logic of the universe. They are the indices of the universal wisdom of the Father."

Mr. Markham has never summed it all up so suc-

cinctly—the meaning of that last prose sentence—as he did in a little four-lined poem which he calls “A Little Creed.” One of our good philosophical friends, Bishop Francis J. McConnell, has written a book called *The Christlike God*. That book is close to two hundred pages in length. The poet has summed up the same thought for us in his little quatrain. I interpolate here the interesting fact—which is a revelation of his reverence for the church and the ministry—that he never quotes that quatrain for me that he does not boast that the New York Preachers’ Club has adopted that little poem as its slogan. He is consumed with pride over that fact and boasts of it. The quatrain, reference to which is made elsewhere in this book, reads:

“Here is the truth in a little creed,  
Enough for all the ways we go:  
In Love is all the Law we need;  
In Christ is all the God we know.”<sup>2</sup>

We have another philosopher, Dr. Edgar S. Brightman, who has written a book called *The Problem of God*, in which he discusses learnedly, and somewhat at length, the problem of evil in the world; and the question of a “limited God,” a God in struggle; a God always evolving; a God who needs us; a God who has within himself what Doctor Brightman calls “The Given.”

Where the philosopher takes an entire book

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<sup>2</sup> Unpublished. Reprinted by permission.

to say this significant thing, Edwin Markham says it in fourteen lines; and in those lines even the philosopher admits that the poet has gone to the heart of the problem. Mr. Markham calls the poem "The Nail-Torn God":

"Here in life's chaos make no foolish boast  
That there is any God omnipotent,  
Seated serenely in the firmament,  
And looking down on men as on a host  
Of grasshoppers blown on a windy coast,  
Damned by disasters, maimed by mortal ill,  
Yet who could end it with one blast of Will.  
This God is all a man-created ghost.

"But there *is* a God who struggles with the All,  
And sounds across the worlds his danger-call.  
He is the builder of roads, the breaker of bars,  
The One forever hurling back the Curse—  
The nail-torn Christus pressing toward the stars,  
The Hero of the battling universe."<sup>3</sup>

Can one read these two poems, compact and convincing, and not feel that this poet-philosopher has thought through two of the great religious problems of all time? But buttressing the foregoing comes even a more explicit and affirming statement of his belief and his faith:

"My new convictions swept the old effigies into the dust-heap; but this did not deliver me into a godless universe, did not surrender my hopes to the clutch of a blind Chance, a nameless Something, forever mumbling Enigma. I still felt that there

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<sup>3</sup> From *Eighty Songs at Eighty*.

is One who watches, One who sorrows in our sorrows. This faith cannot answer all the wild questions of the heart, but it can do something to alleviate the pain of failure and the pathetic uncertainty of life. We are all aware that there is something wild in the world—glance at the newspaper with its catalogue of murders, poverties, and cruel luxuries. Still there is something in me that makes me believe that there is a Purpose striving in all this tumult of nature and history. Perhaps life will be seen to have reason and symmetry when looked at from some watchtower in Eternity.”

He put this same thought into a little poem in *The Shoes of Happiness*:

“There is a high place in the upper air,  
So high that all the jarring sounds of earth—  
All cursing and all crying and all mirth—  
Melt to one murmur and one music there.

“And so, perhaps, high over worm and clod,  
There is an unimaginable goal,  
Where all the wars and discords of the soul  
Make one still music to the heart of God.”

One who understands the mind of this poet knows that when he has thought through to a great insight into the meaning of life; after he has put it into a prose statement, he invariably, somewhere, sometime, sums it all up in a nugget of golden verse so that he who runs may read and understand. He has the art of putting the most abstract philosophical thought into such simple poetry that, often, the shal-



low thinker assumes that he is not philosophical and that he does not penetrate intellectually into the deeper meanings of life. None more foolish than that judgment.

Says the poet-philosopher, always searching, seeking, adventuring into the realms of the abstract meanings of life; and man's relations to life and eternity:

"For long years I was confused as to man's place in the world-order. Is he merely a higher animal? and does he find the principle of his life in the nature-passions and carnal battles of the wilderness? Is he a brother to the wolf, finding his only hope in the brute struggle for existence? Men certainly have joined in the brute struggle since the rise of recorded history. It is only from the tongue of old tradition that we get tidings of the ages before history, when men lived in a wise innocence, moving in all their ways and works in the sweet and reasonable law of brotherhood.

"When man appeared upon the planet, the ages of animal evolution ended and the ages of spiritual evolution began. The competitive struggle among men is simply a part of our brute inheritance. This struggle must give way to something nobler, or man's soul will never rise to the full measure of a man. Man's spirit needs a ground higher than the nature-ground. For his deeper and dormant nature is not wolfish: it is brotherly. The struggle for his own life must give way to a struggle for the life of

others. The survival of the fittest must give way to the fitting of all to survive. The Golden Rule must displace the rule of gold. Man was made for the adventure of love. All true morality for man must be based on unselfish service.

"It is to this glad spirit of the early world that weary men must return if they would find their lost paradise. With Ego as the god of their worship, they have heaped and hoarded; found all treasures but the one worth finding—happiness. Men have stormed across the planet, seeking their selfish pleasure, searching forever for something that will ease the heart's desire. Riches wrung from destitutions, palaces built on poverties, satieties founded on starvations—is this spectacle the end of the moving mystery of life? We were not called into Time to curl up in these hollow shells: we are here to evolve rational and immortal souls, and to perfect them in the practice of the social and heroic virtues. Man realizes himself only when he identifies his life with the common life. There is no rest for man but in fellowship—in the beautiful concords, sympathies, and services of a Comrade Kingdom. Jesus saw this, and came preaching the kingdom of heaven, that New Order wherein men should love and labor and keep themselves 'unspotted from the world.'

"The great souls of all ages have moved under the inspiration of this divine idea. They have called on all men to subordinate the private self to the

public self. In this spirit, the patriots of all lands have defended the national honor and built up the fabric of the public safety. In this spirit, Socrates drank the hemlock, that he might not seem to betray the ideal he had lifted for the eyes of Athens. In this spirit Gustavus Adolphus and William of Orange poured out their lives to make secure imperiled liberties of man. In this spirit Savonarola thundered against the social iniquities of Florence and carried to the end his dream of a Christian commonwealth. In this spirit Garibaldi rejected the crown of a kingdom to become in that moment the king of Europe. In this spirit Shelley sang the sorrows of the toilers through the melodious passion of his "Prometheus." In this spirit Mazzini pressed on with heroic hope through his long, lonely, and stormy apostolate. In this spirit our Lincoln held the duties of his public service sacred as the worship at an altar. And in this spirit Carlyle, 'the wisest and the saddest of this group of gigantic men,' came preaching his grim gospel, picturing the Pools of Erebus hidden in our social abyss, and calling on the Strongest and the Best to descend into that human deep to lift the burdens of the people and to give them hope.

"Our world, more than ever dreamed of, is touched and kindled by the World Unseen. 'The Visible becomes the bestial when it rests not on the Invisible.' For the Invisible and the Beyond are more real than the Actual. The Ideal brooding

above the universe draws man ever on and on. It will not let him rest. It is forever breaking and sweeping away the ephemeral facts and forms in which man houses for a moment his eager hopes. Back in the ages when the monsters battled in the teeming slime, there was something more real than they. It was the ideal, the God-purpose, brooding above and transforming them to a nobler use and beauty. Above the buried acorn forever calls the archetypal oak. Above these tribes of men, now rending one another, stands the ideal man, stirring them out of their easy conceit and kindling them with the passion for perfection. Arcturus and Orion are finished, but man is just begun. Above men is the ideal man; and, above our poor imperfect social order, shines the radiant ideal of the Free State, fixed and forever beautiful. Human governments are heaving with ceaseless unrest under the shaping power of this invisible Presence.

“Kingdoms rise and crumble, institutions appear and perish, fortunes take form and fade. Let us not wonder, for at the heart of all of them is selfishness—the work of death. Upon the ephemeral *Is*, presses the eternal *Ought*. Behind this *Ought* presses the shoulder of God; and under that pressure all things change, all things rise and fall—fall, only to rerise in a restless reaching for the Ideal. Only the Ideal endures. What ought to be will be—this is my faith.

“All the records and ruins of the past bear wit-



ness that whatever is cruel or false or selfish is ephemeral and insecure."

Mr. Markham expresses this thought in one of his great poems, "The Testimony of the Dust," in *The Shoes of Happiness*:

"Voices are crying from the dust of Tyre,  
From Karnak and the stones of Babylon—  
'We raised our pillars upon self-desire,  
And perished from the large gaze of the sun.'

"A grandeur looked down from the pyramid,  
A glory came to Greece, a light on Rome;  
But in them all the ancient Traitor hid,  
And so they passed like momentary foam.

"There was no substance in their soaring hopes:  
The voice of Thebes is now a desert cry;  
A spider bars the road with filmy ropes  
Where once the feet of Carthage thundered by.

"A bittern cries where once Queen Dido laughed;  
A thistle nods where once the Forum poured;  
A lizard lifts and listens on a shaft,  
Where once of old the Colosseum roared.

"It is a Vision waiting and aware;  
And you must draw it down, O men of worth—  
Draw down the New Republic held in air,  
And make for it foundations on the Earth!"

Edwin Markham is always sounding forth this trumpet blast of challenge to bring that New World down out of the skies "And make for it foundations on the Earth."

Once again we watch these two streams of Mark-

ham's spiritual growth, and the stream of his social vision of the future meeting. These two streams of the spiritual and the social which go to make up the religion of Edwin Markham have both found their sources in the spirit, and the religion of Jesus the Nazarene. Markham says:

"Thousands are dead to the higher things. Only a few, perhaps, ever feel a keen sense of justice; and fewer still ever feel the fire of the social passion, the passion of Jesus. We are 'dead,' as was said of old by the tentmaker of Tarsus. If we were alive, we would be like young gods burning with white anger over the world's wrong. But in spite of all this there are signs of the morning. Men and women are beginning to organize for the common welfare and to question the ancient traditions—beginning to question whether it is necessary to have a world where the Few ride headlong on the beast of Greed, while the Many are forgotten under the trampling hoofs. There are vast social movements among the nations, all tending toward the reconstruction of society on the principle of fraternity. A Secret Power is moving on the human deep. Men everywhere are asking: 'Where is God?' They see no God, says a wise thinker, because they see no providence. Millions upon millions go down in squalor, disease, poverty, and misery. So men are asking, 'Where is God?' The answer is, 'God is where men find him!' His providence is where men organize providence. There is no providence ready-made

for men. God is in the world in the raw materials of providence, in the primary elements of providence. Let men find providence where they have found the steam engine and the telegraph; where they found the reaper and the printing press. Let them organize providence in society, and the world will have a providence. Providence is latent; let us bring it forth by social effort—the effort that is prayer. If men would find safety, they must co-operate with the Purpose, the God-purpose, that is brooding over the world.

“I cannot predict the form of the better social order of the future. Perhaps no system now proposed by imaginative thinkers would meet the intricate needs of men. Yet let no man say that the New Order will not descend—let him not deny the hope of the world. To-day does not know to-morrow. But it seems certain that the Power within evolution is pressing onward to the birth of an organic social people. This was the vision of the Hebrew bards and prophets; this was the expectation of the Christian apostles and martyrs. And the fire of this hope is a living force in the writings of John Ruskin, of Charles Kingsley, of Victor Hugo, of Horace Greeley, of Theodore Parker and of Leo Tolstoy.”

In a poem called “Conscripts of the Dream,” from *The Shoes of Happiness*, Markham pays his tribute to a few of the pioneers and seers of this age to be, this social order and the hope of it and the men

who have through all the years seen it, and who have done their part to bring it to pass:

“Give thanks, O heart, for the high souls  
That point us to the deathless goals—  
For all the courage of their cry  
That echoes down from sky to sky;  
Thanksgiving for the armed seers  
And heroes called to mortal years—  
Souls that have built our faith in man,  
And lit the ages as they ran.

“Lincoln, Mazzini, Lamennais,  
Doing the deed that others pray;  
Cromwell, Saint Francis, and the rest,  
Bearing the God-fire in the breast—  
These are the sons of sacred flame,  
Their brows marked with the secret name—  
The company of souls supreme,  
The conscripts of the mighty Dream.

. . . . .

“Give thanks for heroes that have stirred  
Earth with the wonder of a word.  
But all thanksgiving for the breed  
Who have bent destiny with deed—  
Souls of the high, heroic birth,  
Souls sent to poise the shaken earth,  
And then called back to God again  
To make heaven possible for men.”

Then follows a discussion of death from the poet's lips:

“No man can tell what life means to him unless he also tells what death means to him. If the grave is a doorless pit, then life grows dark with the shadow of pathetic uncertainties. But if death is a



door (as I believe), then an illumination falls on life, lighting up the dark brink of the world. If we go on, surviving the grave, there is hope that we shall find a world that will set this world right, find a wisdom that will explain the enigma of our existence, and somehow justify its changes and wild chances. For life, as I see it in this brief arc that has been revealed, is crowded with ‘Wrongs undressed and insults unavenged and unavengable.’

“So death has one aspect that is benignant and beautiful. It may answer my heart’s desire; it may give what life denies. It may satisfy my long ambition, my ambition to find a social order founded on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity; an order where I shall ask nothing for myself that all others may not have on equal terms; an order where there shall be a complete effacement of all the barriers that hinder the common man in the achievement of the common destiny; an order where there shall be a reverence for woman and a practice of the beautiful poetry of humanity.

“But the world with all its lacks and bounds is still a school for moral heroism. Life is still a stuff to try the soul upon—the soul that has been invited to share the friendships of the universe and to join the long adventure of Immortality. The world has gone wrong; yet it may be a good world for me, as it is one that needs me—and you—and all men—men of good will—to make it better.

“Our effort to build and fortify the virtue of the

world will build and fortify our own. Let there be songs, then, and thanksgiving for Earth—

“Earth that is one of many goals,  
A place where God is making souls!”

If Edwin Markham should affiliate with any denomination, it would be with the Swedenborgians, I have no doubt. He has told me many times, however, that he does not belong to that church. Nevertheless, he has been quickened and awakened by this great seer, as he calls him. He has written a most striking treatise on Swedenborg, some of which I here quote, with his permission:

“There are two great sources of knowledge—science and seership. The poets, and all masters of intuition, belong to the realm of the seers.

“We all know that science sheds light only upon our material world, and never penetrates into the vast realities of the spiritual world. Only the seers, with the illustrious Swedenborg at their head, have thrown any light upon those vast mysteries. The seers of the Bible shed only a fragmentary illumination, leaving many things in shadow. The world had to wait till Swedenborg came with the vaster illumination, an illumination so great that Elizabeth Barrett Browning says, ‘The only light that has ever been cast on the other life is in Swedenborg’s philosophy.’

“So we should always hold the listening attitude. Every messenger has a right to be heard, has a right

to have his claims examined. But what is the test of his truth—the test of any man’s truth? First, his message must be found to be in harmony with all we know to be truth in the past. Second, it must be found to be a light to the mind and a bread to the heart. And, third, it must stand the test of life; it must be workable. I believe that the wisdom of Swedenborg will be found to stand these tests at every point. Emerson said: ‘Swedenborg is one of the mastodons of literature, one not to be measured by whole colleges of scholars.’ ”

Markham says of Swedenborg and his philosophy of religion:

“In all his pages we find no muddy mysticism. We never come upon anything visionary or fanatical. We still find the calm investigator, the seasoned and reasoned thinker, the clear, far-seeing philosopher.

“A long list of great scholars and writers have been influenced by Swedenborg. They have borne their testimony to his greatness. Among them may be listed Goethe, Heine, Balsac, Strindberg, the Brownings, Patmore, Ruskin, Carlyle, Thoreau, Emerson, Holmes, Henry James, Phillips Brooks, Edward Everett Hale, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. The late Bishop John H. Vincent, founder with Lewis Miller of Chautauqua, frequently voiced his indebtedness for spiritual insight to Swedenborg.

“Balzac utters this testimony: ‘I have returned to Swedenborg after vast studies of all religions. His

books hold the elements of a vast social conception. His theocracy is sublime, and his religion is the only one a superior man can accept. He also enables a man to touch God. He creates a thirst for God. He rescues the majesty of God from the swaddling clothes in which he has been muffled by other faiths.'

"We cannot catch the full meaning of the influence of this great seer on Edwin Markham's religious thinking until we read the poem which Markham wrote to Swedenborg:

#### "SWEDENBORG"

(A dedicatory poem read at the unveiling of Adolph Jonsson's bust of Swedenborg in Lincoln Park, Chicago, Illinois, on June 28, 1924.)

"Out of the North the great Seer rose to scan  
The genesis and destiny of man,  
The shrewd geometries of earth and star,  
Of atoms swinging in their voids, as far  
Apart as sun from circling sun—to find,  
In the vast frame of nature, laws that wind  
In widening spirals, up from living clod,  
Till lost in the immensity of God.

"He saw Man sitting on the Central Throne,  
The shadows of Him over the Kosmos blown;  
Quickened by Heaven, his listening spirit heard  
The far-flung echoes of the Primal Word,  
Bright harmonies that fall from sphere to sphere,  
Telling the heart that God is ever near—  
That all our world of mysteries and laws  
Glasses a deeper world, the World of Cause—  
That nature is woven and let down to be  
The Time-veil of the hushed Eternity.



"They called him 'visionary clad in mist,'  
 And yet he stood earth's iron realist.  
 Surveying Earth and Heaven in reverent awe,  
 He found that all is mercy hid in law;  
 Beheld men moving on their fateful roads  
 Toward their self-chosen, far, unseen abodes;  
 Beheld men, in their reason or their whim,  
 Moving toward Heavens or Hells beyond the rim,  
 Where—whether fiend, philosopher or fool—  
 The deep, interior love comes forth to rule.  
 And so he saw the long unbreakable thread  
 That binds the living ever to the dead.

"He heard God calling out of every need,  
 And saw life's deeper worship in a deed;  
 Could find no power in all the world to loose  
 A soul to freedom but a life of use;  
 Could find no rest on any unseen shore  
 But in the Love that was our rest before.  
 Back in the abyss of theologic night  
 He was the one man who beheld the Light;  
 His were the eyes on the front of that dark age  
 Which read the Truth upon the judgment page.  
 And thus this guest of the angelic spheres  
 Let out a gleam of Heaven upon the years!"

Thus we perceive the religion of Edwin Markham to be, first of all, a mingling of two streams, the stream of spiritual vision, and the stream of social justice; two rivers which for half of his life flowed side by side, each in its own way, each with its own colorings from the heights and the depths; of the peaks and the valleys; the one colored by the immaculate snows of spiritual insights and spiritual heights; the other colored by the earth and valley of human toil through which it flowed.

This stream of his religious life and thought, however, has not received all of its tributaries with a discussion of the meeting of these two streams of the spiritual and the social. Nor have all of its tributaries been noted when we have shown what the Swedenborg theology poured into its mighty waters. To make complete the story of this wide stream we must go into Edwin Markham's own life—his personal, inner life—and see what has happened; what religious influences from home and church poured into him. To that end I have talked with him frequently around my own hearthfire, talked into the still, small hours; from twilight to dawn.

Markham found God through a twofold process; one a single, definite, upheaving religious experience in adolescence; the other through a slow process of evolution, brought about by a lifelong contact with the church, with preachers, a devoted Christian mother, and through the influences we have just noted.

I sat with him one evening in my study. I said: "Your poetry is full of the Christ-concept of life and living. The Christian note rings through it. I want to trace with you the stages of what we call your personal religious experience. I want to know the long, slow processes, and the mountain peaks which fringe that process."

Said the poet on that unforgettable evening: "My mother was a Roman matron, a woman of power, one who could have led an army to battle, but she

was also a thoughtful woman with a strong slant toward religion.

"I remember once that she spent half the night reading Piazza Smith on *The Problem of the Pyramids*. That book was a treatment of religion in its origin, a book wherein a learned professor undertook to show that the ancients had projected into the construction of the underground Pyramids some of the high problems of astronomy, and some insight into the early history, not only of the Jewish race and religion, but of all races and religions.

"She was a seeker after religious truth always and took me with her, even as a mere child, on these religious quests. She belonged to the Campbellite Church, known now as the Disciples. There was just enough controversy and clash of wits in that early church to satisfy her keen and vivid intelligence. In those days the Disciples specialized in Bible lore, and what was not known to them of immersion as the true form of baptism was not known to any group on earth.

"I remember that now and then my mother would dress me and take me to what were called 'revival meetings' or 'protracted meetings,' where all the celebrities of the church came, each of them dowered with immense beards and broad-bottomed physical bodies; preachers with voices like the voices of the seven thunders of Patmos; voices that could and did hurl thunderbolts of the fear of God into the most abject sinners."

All through this strange story we see that Mr. Markham's mother had a keen interest in religion and a keener interest in seeing that her seven-year-old son was exposed to its influences, so the first thing we note in his early personal search for God and truth was his "Roman matron" mother's guiding influence.

Then came the influence of those early California preachers themselves, and it is like reading romance to hear the poet's own descriptions of these pioneering preacher-prophets and how they changed his young life.

"Among the great preachers of that church in those early days was Alexander Johnson, a tall, thin, wiry personality, with broad clifflike brows; long, skinny fingers like the talons of a vulture, and whenever he walked across the floor of a church toward the pulpit he was the target of all eyes. He was a thoughtful man, crammed with Bible quotations and always ended his sermons with a terrific appeal to the terrors of the law.

"We all sat there, especially the children, pale and horrified with the prospect of a gulf of hell into which we might soon be hurled. In those days there was not so much 'sweetness and light' in preaching. Those preachers seemed to be terribly in earnest. They had what Goethe called 'an inner earnestness' in their preaching, looking upon life and religion as a most serious business.

"I remember that we had Sunday school first, up



in the Suisun Hills, and the preaching came afterward. For several years we had a preacher who filled our pulpit, who was some sixty years of age. He used to go into the pulpit, take his text and preach for an hour and a half. He never closed his sermons without bursting into a flood of tears. He became so emotionalized and electrified that he always closed his sermons in a tempest of tears. So I always used to associate weeping with the pulpit function. If a preacher didn't weep, I felt as if he had not done his duty as a preacher."

And now, Mr. Markham, after telling of those early pioneering influences in his religious life, tells us of his conversion and baptism, which came after he had gone to Normal School in San José, California.

"I joined the church and was immersed in San José, California. I was immersed in a deep pool outside of the town somewhere. I took the matter seriously, and, while I don't look upon baptism with quite the intensity of those early brethren, still I look upon religion with the same seriousness that I always did. I know that the truly religious man is the only man who has founded his life on reason and Christ.

"However, my deepest religious experience did not come until after my baptism in that out-of-doors pool in San José. My religious experience came to me one day like a burst of sunshine from a dark and perplexing cloud. I had been thinking it over.

The preacher had come to see me, and to talk to me about religion. From the time I was two years of age I had been an attendant on Sunday school and preaching. When I was herding mother's sheep on the Suisun Hills of California I had given a great deal of time to committing the Gospel pages to memory. As I walked the hills after the sheep I carried my little Bible in my hand. As I sat on great rocks watching the day-star arise, and on through the sunny noons of California to the golden sunsets touched with the golden glory of God's handiwork, I read my Bible even as a ten-year-old boy.

"My mind goes back to that ten-year period when I memorized most of the Gospels as I tended sheep like young David of old. I could repeat a hundred pages from memory as a child, pages of the gospel of Jesus that I memorized while tending my mother's sheep."

So we see how the Bible, particularly the Gospels of Jesus, helped to bring about this deep, reverent religious coloring of this great poet's writing. He himself says further:

"The gospel of Jesus is the one thing that has had the most profound influence in my life. When you free that gospel of the befogging vapor of theology, you have in it the greatest utterance of human rights and liberations, the greatest cry for justice, the loftiest appeal to man's idealism, and the most beautiful picture of the great hopes for the soul that are available to human kind."

And now comes the actual descriptions of this great poet's conversion:

“I remember, however, after I had been baptized, and after I had joined the church, even after I had been within the influence of the church from two years of age, a very definite time when what I call my religious experience came to me. I had been listening to a series of ‘revival sermons’ when all at once it came over me like a flash of revealing light, light such as never had been seen by me on land or sea; light such as shines only from some great Paradise; light that I shall never forget; that the only path to travel was the path that leads to the feet of Christ and his cross. I saw it all in this burning, blazing, almost blinding flash of insight. And with very deep emotion I told the preacher of my experience and of my insight. I told him of that blazing light, of my Road-to-Damascus experience. I was overcome by it.

“I was again taken up to the altars of the church and given the hand of fellowship. This church claimed to have no catechism and no creed. They claimed then that their only creed was the Bible; that any one could be received into the church who acknowledged Christ as Saviour. *I did that!* He must also express a desire to live in conformity with Christ's teaching. I made that pledge and have tried to live up to it since that day.

“I was deeply moved in my emotion. I certainly had the feeling that I had taken a sudden and serious

step upon the new path of the light I had seen; a step that was to lead me away from the frivolities and general disorders of the world. From that high moment on I have felt a closer unity with the Divine Master; and that unity has never been broken even unto this hour. That unity is one of the sure permanencies of my life."

Now the great poet adds some interesting memories of a growing religious life and a changing denominationalism.

"After graduating from Normal School at San José, I went to teach at Colma, where gold was first discovered up in the mountains. There I joined the Methodist Church at twenty-two years of age. It was a Union Church and everybody attended. A man we called 'A. J.,' 'a presiding elder,' preached there from time to time. When he came to town we were great cronies. He taught mathematics in the College of the Pacific and preached on Sundays. He was close to my soul. We were kindred spirits. He was no mere theologian, full of vapory guesses at things that nobody knows anything about. He was a powerful preacher, full of thought, quoted Kant and Hegel in his sermons, knew the poets in spite of the fact that he was a teacher of mathematics; was a thoroughgoing 'Modernist' in the sense that he was reading and thinking and knew the conclusions of science; believed that Christ saved men by projecting a tremendous personality into the world, thereby stirring the dead character within us.



He was one of the strongest factors in my young life. Christ was personified truth in him and that appealed to me.

"He had a tuft of beard on his chin, a quick, searching eye. He was a deep lover of philosophy when it reached out toward religious clarity. He always came loaded to the hilt with notes on life.

"He came into the community by stagecoach once in three months.

"Two or three nights 'A. J.' and I sat up all night talking over the problems of existence—and of how we could work out a rational ground for religion."

And now comes into the poet's life the influence of religious books and a great New England preacher. Let him tell of that mysterious revelation and whisper:

"Up in that little isolated mountain village one day I was told in subdued whispers of a certain old deserted barn in the loft of which there was the remnant of an Episcopal rector's library. He had left it there. 'They're yours if you want them,' my informant whispered.

"I climbed up into this old loft and, sure enough, there were some precious books. I felt as if I had discovered a continent, or, since I was in the old gold region of California, as if I had discovered gold again in those beautiful hills of Colma. Millman's *History of Latin Christianity* was there, and many other books, but the crowning find was a series of books and discourses of William Ellery Channing.

I seized them all like a hungry Robinson Crusoe lost on a desert island. I ran home and for six months every spare minute I read those books. I began to see that there was a broad and lofty view of religion; a view founded on common sense, and yet, which had in it the mystic vision also—such as I had experienced in my conversion a few years before down in San José.”

So we have seen this great American's search for God. We have seen that there were some very definite influences in that search; in his religious life; running from childhood days at two years of age down to the present. We have seen the influence of a 'Roman matron mother,' the influence of preachers, the influence of Bible reading and memorizing when he was a shepherd on the Suisun Hills tending his mother's sheep, the influence of Sunday school, of baptism, of uniting with the church; of a very definite religious experience, and, finally, of an old abandoned Episcopalian rector's library with a group of William Ellery Channing's sermons. It was a gradual process, with here and there a mountain peak looming up. But it was definite and real.

Chronologically, the Swedenborg influence flowed into the stream of Markham's religious life long after these definite religious experiences of which he speaks in the preceding paragraphs, but I have chosen to leave them to the last of this chapter because they make up the intimate old-time testimony

of a man who has found and who knows God through a religious experience such as Paul had on the road to Damascus and such as his own hero philosopher, Swedenborg, had in his “Illumination” as he calls it.

In conclusion, let us remember that the stream of his religious life has been formed by the conjunction of two major streams, the stream of the spiritual and the stream of the social. For many years they ran as two separate streams, each with its own content and color. Then they merged, like the Arve and the Rhone, and flowed on as one. But through all the years from childhood to eighty there have been many tributaries which have poured into this religious stream of his life; particularly the great tributary of the Swedenborg influence. But the clear, the blue-green clearness of that mighty body of spiritual volume now flows on by itself, flows on, ever widening and deepening, flows on to refresh the earth, flows on toward its great and final emptying; and that cannot be far away—its great emptying into the spiritual life of the seas eternal.

## CHAPTER X

### "LIFE WAS HIS EXILE, EARTH HIS ALIEN SHORE"

#### AN INTERPRETATION OF EDWIN MARKHAM—THE MAN AND THE IMMORTAL

"He walked our streets as on a lonely strand:  
His country was not here—it was afar.  
Not here his home, not here his motherland,  
But in some statelier star.

"Life was his exile, Earth his alien shore,  
And these were foreign faces that he passed;  
For, he had other language, other lore,  
And he must home at last."<sup>1</sup>

THEY were celebrating the poet's seventy-eighth birthday, on April 23, on Staten Island a few years ago.

The poet and his wife stood on the porch of their humble old frame house in Westerleigh, Staten Island. The wind was biting cold, but the trees were in leaf and flowers were blooming in the yard at their feet. There was brave music in the air.

Sure enough, the music was a little out of tune; and the band a little out of step, but it was sincere music, for it was being beaten out from drum, flute, trombone, and cornet, by the boys of the Mount

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<sup>1</sup> From "Our Israfel."



Loretta School. The school children of Staten Island were serenading the good, gray poet on his birthday. They liked it, and it was plain to be seen that he liked it also.

The little children could hardly keep up, and certainly did not keep in step, either with the band music or with the older children, but they were laughing, and smiling, and yelling hilariously as they drew near to the poet. Some of the tiny ones had to run to keep up with the parade.

As the children drew near to him the poet stood with his hands in the pockets of an old worn coat, his white hair blowing in the brisk, chilly wind. He had on his old black *sombrero*. As the band marched up and the children surrounded him, singing "Happy birthday to you," Mrs. Markham tells me that the poet brushed a tear from his cheek.

"It is the wind," he said, but those of us who know the poet have our ideas about that. It was something besides the wind that brought those tears to his cheeks.

Then he made a little speech to those hundreds of children. With inimitable adaptation to the age and mood of those children, who had just presented him with a cake and with a jar of honey, he turned to Mrs. Markham and handed her the jar saying, so that the children could hear him, "Honey for my honey."

Then he turned to the children and said: "This is the finest birthday I ever had—except one—and that

was the first one. I want to thank you handsome young ladies and gentlemen for being so good to me. This honor puffs me up. It makes me proud and vain. From now on when I walk up and down the street it will be pompously, like this" (then he puffed out his chest like a pouter pigeon, much to the peril of the cake, but to the delight of the children). "'At last,' I shall say to myself, 'I have arrived.'"

The children shouted with delight. Then he recited several brief poems. One of these was "Three Green Eggs." The children loved it. They applauded vociferously. He said, with a twinkle in his dark eyes: "That applause indicates a very high grade of intelligence. Those quatrains are clever—v-e-r-i-e clever!"

Again the children shouted their pleasure. Then when the motion picture artists were taking several poses and Mr. Markham was talking for the news reels, the children, his beloved friends, crowded about him so closely that they upset the cameras and policemen had to be called in to make it possible for the pictures to be taken—all in a friendly mood, for the poet loves both excitement and children.

Here is an etching out of the poet's life. He loves children and they are devoted to him. As he walks down the streets in his home town they greet him as a comrade. Like Riley, Markham is the understanding and loving friend of little children. I have watched him with one child through the

years. During his friendship with that family that little girl-child has grown from babyhood to college age; and they have, through all of those years, been incomparable friends. When that child was asleep during babyhood, when the poet was visiting our home, he used to like to go into her room on sandaled feet to watch her in her sleep, as she lay with touseled hair on white pillows in perfect relaxation. He would stand for ten minutes watching her deep breathing, stand with a beautiful reverence for childhood. "I love to watch them sleep. It is the most perfect relaxation on earth. It is peace. It is beauty," he would say and walk quietly into his room to write a poem under the spell of that picture of innocence, peace, and repose.

Certainly, one of the most dominant characteristics of the poet is his love for little children, in spite of the strange fact that he has written few poems which could be called child poems. However, he has done something better than that, he has written poems which literally drip with his love for children, and with understanding of their psychology. Many of his child poems were written to Virgil, his only son, who is now a grown man and an author in his own right. The poem over which the children yelled with delight was entitled "At Little Virgil's Window." The poet had always said to Virgil, from childhood, that a poem could be written about anything. Virgil used to come running into the house with rocks, stones, bugs, and

butterflies, and say: "There, write a poem about that, father. You say that a poem can be written about anything?"

One day he ran in with wild excitement, pulled his father to the window, pointed out a bird's nest with three green eggs in it, and demanded that his father write a poem about that nest. This is the poem:

"There are three green eggs in a small brown pocket,  
And the breeze will swing and the gale will rock it,  
Till three little birds on the thin edge teeter,  
And our God be glad, and our world be sweeter."

It is a treat to hear the poet recite this poem to a crowd of children. They clap their hands, laugh, yell, and jump up and down with delight. They understand that poem and they love the poet. There is something inimitable about his voice, and the way he swings into that last line; something of the Faun, of laughing children, of singing angels, of sunlit dawns, of eternal, wild laughter in his very voice as he reads that last line. In contrast with that poem, written in the spirit of a child's understanding, let us read one in which the poet sums up the love of a father for his child better than it has ever been done before, and better than it will ever be done again by any other poet. The parent will understand what it all means better than any other. The parent will remember through two lines of this poem:



"Would I could be by your side when you fall—  
Would that my own heart could suffer it all!"

Remember the first day that that parent's child was sent off to school, and then to college; to marriage and then out into the world away from home; and then down into the vale of trouble and heartache, of birth, death, and uncertainty:

"Would I could be by your side when you fall—  
Would that my own heart could suffer it all."

Could that particular psychology have been put any more tenderly? The entire poem is called "Child of My Heart." It comes from *Lincoln, and Other Poems*.

"Child-heart!  
Wild heart!  
What can I bring you,  
What can I sing you,  
You who have come from a glory afar,  
Called into Time from a secret star?

"Fleet one!  
Sweet one!  
Whose was the wild hand  
Shaped you in child-land,  
Framing the flesh with a flash of desire,  
Pouring the soul as a fearful fire?

"Strong child!  
Song child!  
Who can unravel  
All your long travel  
Out of the Mystery, birth after birth—  
Out of the dim worlds deeper than Earth?

“Mad thing!  
Glad thing!  
How will Life tame you?  
How will God name you?  
All that I know is that you are to me  
Wind over water, star on the sea.

“Dear heart!  
Near heart!  
Long is the journey,  
Hard is the tourney:  
Would I could be by your side when you fall—  
Would that my own heart could suffer it all!”

On the day of the seventy-eighth birthday celebration several policemen were there to keep the crowds of children in order. They enjoyed the celebration as much as the children. One of them said: “I’ll tell you how it is. Mr. Markham here stays up until all hours of the night; even until three and four o’clock in the morning writing his poetry. We’re always welcome when we see his light burning to come in and visit with him. Mr. Markham and I used to work out plans between poems to catch that pants burglar on Staten Island.” He referred to a mysterious midnight prowler, who at that time was stealing pants by reaching in through windows at night while people slept.

The policeman is right. Edwin Markham would welcome them in “at all hours of the night.” That picture, in a brief paragraph, gives us two phases of his eccentricities; his human characteristics. He

works until "all hours of the night." He is different from the rest of us in that respect. He tells me that he got into this habit first when he was a young teacher in El Dorado County, where he used to sit up half the night discussing the social problems with his men friends, and now and then with a preacher. In another chapter he tells of how two or three times he stayed up all night, even as far back as those California days, talking with the old Methodist preacher who came every three months to El Dorado. Mr. Markham has written much of his great poetry in the wee small hours of the night. He says that that is the best time for creative effort; because of the sense of aloneness, with the rest of the world asleep; and the quiet; that the Muse has a better entrée than in this daytime world of mundane confusion. The story of the writing of his Lincoln poem is the most perfect illustration of the effectiveness of this system, which he has worked out. He also likes to read late into the night, even if he is not writing poems. He says that he can concentrate better on philosophical problems in the silent hours of the early dawn. Every one who knows Edwin Markham knows of his habit of remaining up most of the night.

Markham has said to me, "Your bedtime is my morning." He is correct in that statement. But when he does sleep, he sleeps like a child. He often lies down with his clothes on—forgetting, nor caring; weary with work—and ready for sleep. Many a

time, when I have gone to awaken him, I have found him so.

When he awakens about noon of the next day, he turns over in bed with a smile and a lusty laugh like a young child. Then he begins to stretch his facial muscles. He says that we do not exercise these muscles enough, so each morning, before he rises, he has a ritual of "setting-up exercises" through which he goes. He twists and stretches his eyes and mouth and facial muscles into hideous shapes, but that leaves them flexible and flushed with health.

Then he lifts his arms and flips his fingers, shaking them as a cat shakes a mouse. He tosses his fingers literally into the air; and wiggles them like a piano player. The blood begins to tingle in his finger tips, and then he is ready for his abdominal exercises, which he takes in bed, squirming and stretching, and moving about like a young child waking from sleep. It is an exhilarating thing to watch. He says he does this to awaken his face, his fingers, his inner vital organs, his soul from slumber. And all I can add is that it is pragmatic—it works. When he arises he arises like a young giant ready for the day's battles.

Breakfast is not necessary. A cup of tea and he is ready for the fray. There is no necessity for shaving for there is that white beard. A dash of cold water, a brush of that wild, white hair, and the



young giant is "off to the races," as he himself likes to put it.

But when he does eat, it is not white bread. That is his abomination. He declares that white bread is "an abomination to the Lord" and all humanity; that it is poison to the system; and he will prove it, if you will listen; prove it by carefully documented facts, experiences, and testimonies; even by poetry.

If he eats any breakfast at all, it will be five or six shredded-wheat biscuits with fruit; a cup of tea; and then—off to life with a laugh and a gesture of health and eagerness.

He has his little food eccentricities. He likes apple pie *a la mode* as a car likes gasoline and oil, or a sail likes wind.

A dignified teacher in a certain theological school was sitting at lunch with the poet and a group of friends. The poet's mood was hilarious. The poet said to the host, "I will not eat much for lunch; just apple pie *a la mode*, please."

The rest of the party ate a full-grown lunch—as befits the vigorous labors of theological professors.

When the poet ate his ice cream and pie, he used a spoon for his vehicle.

The dignified professor noticed this unorthodox use of the spoon instead of the fork. With his particular New England sense of decorum, his Emily Post conservatism of etiquette, he could not refrain from quietly, but firmly, pushing a fork toward the poet's hand. However, the poet did not seem to

note either his own dereliction, or the professor's gesture of courteous admonition. The host watched this little byplay out of the corner of his amused eye.

About mid-meal the poet turned to the host and said, as if he had already eaten no apple pie *a la mode*: "That waitress must have forgotten to bring me my pie and ice cream. Will you remind her that I am starving? That is not good for what ails me."

Being a more or less polite host, the poet's order was immediately executed and a second helping of apple pie and ice cream was ordered amid the concealed smiles of the diners. Once again the poet ate it with his spoon and once again the meticulous professor of a theological school pushed a fork toward the poet's hand. Once again the poet seemed to ignore the fork and the suggestion.

When it came time for dessert, the guests ordered theirs. A third time the poet said: "If you don't mind, I think I'll just have a little apple pie *a la mode* for my dessert."

The host ordered for a third time this delicacy for the poet—a worthy dish in a worthy cause. A third time the poet started in on his third apple pie *a la mode* with his spoon. A third time the professor gently, but firmly, pushed a fork in his direction.

Then the poet arose to the full height of his dignity, but with a twinkle in his eyes, and thundered:

"Who are you, sir, a mere philosopher, to tell a poet how he shall eat his pie?"

Another scene:

A gentle hostess is entertaining the poet in her Springfield, Massachusetts, home. The poet has just spoken at her husband's church. He has not eaten all day. Upon arrival in Springfield the poet informed the young preacher that he had not eaten since the night before, and the preacher said, "We are to have something to eat after church if you can wait until then."

For two hours the poet entertained a crowd at church. Then there was the little inner circle gathered at the preacher's home to hear the poet read his poems and to shine in the splendor of his genius. But the poet was hungry, and poets who have gone without food for twenty-four hours can get as hungry as anybody else—and they dare let the world know it.

The hostess appears with what the poet calls "a tray of dainty nothings—cakes, cookies, and tea; food to fill a humming bird's belly, but not a hungry poet's stomach."

Then, like his Phidias of old, Markham thundered on her": "What, ho! What are those poison darts for?"

"To eat," says the smiling little hostess with a pleased air.

"What, ho!" thunders the poet: "They are not good for what ails me!"

"What ails you?" timidly asked the hostess.

"I am hungry! I want food! Real food! I have not eaten since last night!"

"Then I shall bring you some real food," replied the hostess, who had caught the poet's bantering ways in a flash.

"Not here, madame! Not here in the presence of your guests, these famished wolves! I am just a poet, and they would snatch real food from me. I would still starve. Take me to your kitchen and feed me real honest-to-goodness food, where these starving men and women will not steal it from me in their hunger."

So to the kitchen the poet was taken by the gracious New England hostess; to eat a full man-sized meal of honest food and not to nibble "those poison darts of dainties."

And that New England hostess remembers to this day, as one of the great adventures of her life, how a poet demanded real food in the presence of her dainty after-church tit-bits; and she remembers that happy half hour in the kitchen when the poet treated her to the most pleasing spectacle a woman can witness; a famished poet devouring her leftovers from dinner. And that woman boasts of it to this day (just as does another poor soul who once sewed a button on the poet's pants), boasts that she fed the great poet in her kitchen; and that "he ate everything she had in the house"; ate with gusto; pouring out poetry and conversation that sparkled



with wit and humor as he poured in food. She remembers to this day how, after his dinner in her kitchen, the poet poured his poetry, his philosophy, and his friendship out to her distinguished guests in utter abandonment, which is characteristic of Edwin Markham in the smaller circles of life.

But no description of Edwin Markham is physically complete until one has spoken of those gray-brown eyes which are always peering out "intent and afar as looking beyond the things that are."

These eyes are the most striking about Edwin Markham's physical appearance. I have heard of the way Lincoln's eyes lighted up; and of how they dominated his facial expression. I have seen the blue eyes of William Allen White; eyes that have laughter in them and a far-away look; eyes that seem also to be always looking "beyond the things that are."

Once when we were having a picture taken at Mr. Ford's in Dearborn, I got the secret of this far-away look in the poet's eyes. I said to him: "Mr. Markham, why are you looking out over the tree-tops?"

He replied, "I am looking for Virgilia."

"Who is Virgilia?"

"Virgilia is my ideal woman. I am always looking for her everywhere; especially when they are about to take a picture of me," he laughed.

But there was a secret symbol there, just the same, a symbol that could not be hidden under the cloak

of humor. That accounts for that far-away look in the poet's eyes; the strangest, weirdest, most beautiful, most wistful pair of human eyes I have ever seen. He who does not believe me, he who may think that this is the exaggerated imagination of a friend—let him take one look into any real picture of the poet; or, better still—into the poet's countenance itself, and be converted. Let him catch the lightning flash of those strange eyes at that dramatic moment when the poet himself is reading his great poem, "The Man With the Hoe," when he shoots his thunderbolts against the "infamous wrongs" of humanity, and when that crash of thunder follows after the lightning streak of indignation which snaps from the blazing window of the soul:

"O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,  
Is this the handiwork you give to God,  
This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched?  
How will you ever straighten up this shape;  
Touch it again with immortality;  
Give back the upward looking and the light;  
Rebuild in it the music and the dream;  
Make right the immemorial infamies,  
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

"O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,  
How will the Future reckon with this Man?  
How answer his brute question in that hour  
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?  
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings—  
With those who shaped him to the thing he is—  
When this dumb Terror shall reply to God—  
After the silence of the centuries?"

No man knows Markham until he has heard him recite that great poem. No man has looked into hell and eternity until he has seen the yawning abyss caught in the lightning flash of the poet's eyes as those last lines are spoken, with raised fist and thunder-voice.

Edwin Markham looks like the poet he is. His utter disregard of clothes is one of his strange eccentricities of genius. The eye and the tradition are satisfied with his physical appearance. He is picturesque; not by design, but because that picturesqueness is the flower of his Western background, his genius, and his spirit. He could no more help looking like a poet than "The Man With the Hoe" could help looking the way he does.

He wears clothes as Theodore Roosevelt, or Bishop William A. Quayle wore them—regardless. He would not look well in a perfectly tailored, a neat, immaculate adornment, any more than John the Baptist or Isaiah or Abraham Lincoln would have looked. Indeed, I always think of Lincoln when I see the way the great interpreter of Lincoln, Edwin Markham, dresses. That gives the perfect picture of his clothes. He wears his clothes as Lincoln wore his; and thinks about as little of how he looks in clothes as Lincoln did, and they hang from him, about as Lincoln's clothes hung from that tall giant.

Edwin Markham is a picturesque poet because he came from a picturesque California background.

He wears either a brown or a black *sombrero* most of the time; a great broad "Tom Mix" style of hat, but wears it as becomes a cowboy of the Suisun Hills. There is no affectation about this *sombrero* any more than there is affectation about the long, black flowing tie which he has always worn. If there is any imitation, the imitation has come on the part of younger poets of the last generations; men who adopted the flowing tie and the *sombrero* from Mr. Markham, men who have never tramped a trail or climbed a peak of Parnassus; or any other kind of a peak. These are the imitators. Markham wears the great *sombrero* because it fits in with his background, his life, his personality; and when he comes on a visit without his *sombrero*, those of us who love him feel that something is missing; that he is not in character; that he has done something sacrilegious to his personality.

On one of his visits to Boston, when he came for one of the most important services he has been called upon to render; that of writing and delivering the splendid Ter-centenary Ode, which was the mountain peak of the entire year's celebration in Massachusetts, he came with a little, round, German-looking hat he had picked up some place; a hat which made him look like the leader of a little Dutch band. We all laughed at him, he looked so ludicrous; so unlike himself. He joined in the laughter and promised us that he would never leave home again without his *sombrero*. That ludicrous little



hat had a rim about an inch wide and it sat on top of his noble head of flowing white hair like a dunce cap. However, in spite of his hat he was still the jovial, conquering poet; and none dared say him nay.

His flowing white hair is perhaps Mr. Markham's most outstanding physical characteristic. It makes him look, as I have suggested, like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman or Joaquin Miller. He is the picture of a poet when this beautiful hair is washed, and shines like silver. That Ritual of the Bath! How he does enjoy it, after the dust of long journeyings! And how he chats about poetry, life, and religion as he refreshes his body; a body strong and symmetrical even in his eighties, tall like a young birch sapling, even in old age, a body to be envied by men of half his years.

Which reminds me of another feature of his physical appearance which seems, somehow, to fit in with his personality: That is his "rough-and-ready beard," as he himself calls it. It is a Westerner's beard. Now and then he gets it trimmed, but it looks more in keeping with the picture we want of the poet, when it is slightly untrimmed. Trimming spoils the picture.

Once, when he was making a visit of several weeks I sat him down in a barber's chair in the Detroit Athletic Club to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. I had to go on an errand, and carelessly failed to give the barber any instructions as to how

to trim that precious poet's beard. The barber did not know Edwin Markham from Adam. Unfortunately, the poet fell asleep in the chair while that barber was serving him, a thing which he is apt to do wherever and whenever he relaxes.

When I got back I found my poet had been trimmed and turned into an Andrew Carnegie. That barber, with no sense of the fitness of things, a man who had been trimming the beards of business men and capitalists for years, had turned the poet into a manufacturer in fifteen minutes, and glowed with pride over his awful handiwork, his eyes bright with professional enthusiasm.

When I looked at my poet I wanted to kill that barber. He had worked a most striking metamorphosis. He had done magic; and none too good a magic at that; for he had taken America's most picturesque living poet and had run him through a mold and turned him out institutionalized and standardized. Detroit has done that to many a poet, preacher, and prophet. But, fortunately, he had not standardized—nor does any force on earth have power to standardize—the poet-soul of Edwin Markham.

It took us a month to outgrow that disgrace. Nobody knew him. That simple device of giving the poet a Van-Dyke beard, an Andrew-Carnegie haircut, made such a change in him that people did not know him when they met him on the street. I have never seen such a change in a man. He looked,

and acted, and said he felt like a singed cat. He acted as if he himself had done something disgraceful. He said to me: "That barber-bird makes me feel as if I were naked before the gaze of the gods. I'll have to hibernate until this hair grows out again or I shall be in ill repute with my friends and my family."

I never knew until that experience just what a crown of glory his white beard and his flowing white hair make for him.

Add to that white hair and that white beard the flowing black tie and his daily adorning silk-lined Tuxedo, which he wears all the time—on the streets, on trains and street cars—and you have a good picture of the poet, physically.

He likes to wear his Tuxedo, the lapels lined with silk (upon which he insists) all the time. He speaks morning, noon, and night, so this is a practical as well as a picturesque habit. In recent years I seldom see him without his Tuxedo.

A wealthy friend of his and mine in Kansas City, Dr. B. B. Ralph, once said to me: "Take the poet down to Rothchild's and buy him a complete new outfit of clothes, including a Tuxedo. Let him have whatever he wants, no matter what it costs. Don't dictate to him and don't limit him in what he wants. Send me the bill."

That was a gala day in the poet's life, and it was a gala day in my life. We spent the day on that clothes-buying adventure.

I said to him: "Now, Mr. Poet, you are to buy whatever you want. There is no limit. Go through this store and take your choice without fear of what it costs."

He was a bit bewildered at first, but I soon convinced him that his friend meant what he had offered. Had not that same man, in recent weeks, given the poet his first trip to the glories of the Grand Canyon, an experience of which I write elsewhere? That helped to convince the poet that fairies were still real; and that a magic wand had, through the generosity of a comrade of means, actually been waved over his fast-fading wardrobe.

He was like a child turned loose in a toy shop. He selected three sets of underwear; a light set of wool, a medium, and a heavy set. He selected a half-dozen pairs of socks, collars, shirts, and pajamas. When he selected the pajamas he selected the wildest pair of silk ones I have ever seen. He said: "I want to look for once in my life like an Oriental potentate. This gives me my chance." Silk handkerchiefs, beautiful ties, gold buttons—everything followed. Santa Claus had come down the chimney of the poet's life. He had always believed in fairies, Santa Claus, magic carpets, and magic wands. Now his faith was being vindicated for him; and he enjoyed it to the uttermost as the entire force of clerks and the proprietor, Mr. Rothchild, enjoyed it; as I did; as the reporters did. To climax the day, there were measurements for a new Tuxedo;



and succeeding days for tailoring and fittings; and finally that climactic day when it adorned his robust form. That tailor never had an experience like fitting and pleasing a poet before. He declared that he did not want the like again. There just *had* to be a certain type of pearl buttons on that Tuxedo. It did not matter that that particular type of pearl button had long since gone the way of the mastodon and other extinct species. There had to be those favorite pearl buttons. And there *were* pearl buttons, if not exactly like, at least like enough to suit the poet.

Then came the gift of a watch to match the Tuxedo. The good friend said: "The poet does not have a watch. I want him to have one; the best you can buy."

Filled with the joy of acting as Santa Claus I sallied forth to our finest jeweler and bought a watch of the latest and most beautiful design that he had. Was the poet pleased? He was not. In fact he was keenly disappointed.

He said: "That thing is too small, too slim. It looks as if it would break easily."

"But it cost one hundred dollars, Mr. Poet!"

"I don't care what it cost. I want a fistfull of watch. I want one that, when you bang it down on a pulpit, or a table, it will make a noise like a ton of falling brick. I want one of those substantial watches; one that feels as if it has something to it when you have it in your vest pocket. I don't

want one of those white-gold things. They're too frail for my fists to handle. I'd always feel as if I were going to crush it like an eggshell when I pulled it out of my pocket. What I want is a he-man's watch!"

I reported this to our benefactor, and he said, with an understanding smile:

"Take the poet down to a pawnshop and let him pick out what he wants. I know what he means. He wants a big, old-fashioned watch which weighs a few pounds, like our fathers used to carry."

To the pawnshop we went and got what he wanted, much to the disgust of the jeweler, when I told him the story; got it for ten dollars (the most we could pay in the substitution); got exactly what the poet wanted in the way of watches; and he wears it to this day with pride and gusto.

Which is just a little glimpse into a poet's personality—a reverent one, a truthful one, set down, not according to form, or according to orthodox biography this writer knows, but a picture, nevertheless, which is necessary to catch the spirit of this unsophisticated, this childlike, simple soul. And I would be faithless to my task if I left it out.

I have never yet seen him with a new suit save the one which came from the Kansas City tailor. He gathers clothes up along the way—hats, overcoats, trousers. Sometimes the trousers match the coat, but often they do not. Where he gets them nobody seems to know. But he always comes to visit us

wearing a different overcoat, and it is usually second-hand.

Clothes do not bother his poet's soul. He is usually unaware of such mundane things as clothes. He does not adorn himself. He does not care. He is not aware. In this respect he is the true "alien soul."

Half of the time he does not know how much money he has; nor in what city he happens to be sojourning; nor on what street he is staying; nor whether he is at home or abroad.

I have never seen a man with an atmosphere of "other-worldliness" such as he has. He is like his own Conrad the Cobbler in "How the Great Guest Came."

"His eyes peered out intent and far,  
As looking beyond the things that are.  
He walked as one who is done with fear,  
Knowing, at last, that God is near.  
Only the half of him cobbled the shoes:  
The rest was away for the Heavenly news.  
Indeed, so thin was the mystic screen  
That parted the Unseen from the Seen,  
You could not tell, from the cobbler's theme  
If his dream were truth or his truth were dream."

Side by side with this "other-worldliness" there is also an uncanny sense of financial obligation; of responsibility in keeping engagements; of rectitude and patience.

Once I loaned him five dollars. I said good-by to that five dollars; glad that it had helped the poet

out in an emergency when he was unable to cash a check. I had forgotten it. Six months afterward, out of a clear sky, as we sat in my study, he reached into his pocket—he who owes me nothing, he to whom I shall always be debtor—and said: “Here’s that five dollars I borrowed from you, William.”

I know of no man, business man or otherwise, who is so faithful to his financial obligations, so scrupulous in fulfilling them, as is Edwin Markham; and yet in all other things he is other-worldly. In fact, were it not for his other-worldliness, he would have enough money to enable him to live in comfort these later days of his life, to enable him to do some of the final creative writing which he wants to do. But instead of that ease to which he has a moral right, even in these very days, as I write, he is off on a long mid-Western trip of three weeks’ lecturing to make a bare living. That does not seem right, but it is a fact. At eighty years of age it is necessary for us this very winter to be planning forty or fifty New England lectures at a moderate fee so that the poet may meet his living expenses.

Not that Mr. Markham has not earned money, for he has. His financial achievement as a poet has been remarkable. But more than once he has been swindled out of large sums of money by trusting men who would, because he was a poet, let him in “on the ground floor” of great and valiant financial enterprises.

“I paid my debts,” said the poet one day, “got



caught up with the world, financially, bought myself a humble cottage home on Staten Island, and, with a carefree sense of joy and exaltation, I was looking forward to years of creative effort and independence. But that was not to be. For I bethought myself of investing what fortune had thrown into my lap. Though my desire was for sound, safe investments, to free me from worldly cares, I was badly advised and guilty of some negligence myself. In my first venture I lost twenty-five thousand dollars. Through a promising land development plan in California I lost an additional fifteen thousand dollars. But before either of these ventures failed I had already lent a large sum of money on valuable property, which, as it turned out, did not actually belong to those who claimed to own it.

"So, in rapid succession, came blow after blow. Here was I in 1912, at the age of sixty, not quite penniless but with my financial power broken. Figuratively speaking, except for my home, I was flat on my back on the cobblestones.

"I consulted with my friends. As one cannot every day produce a poem worth fifty dollars to a publisher, nor one worth five hundred, and as I needed a sure means of livelihood, I chose to go on the platform as lecturer and reader, talking about the art of poetry and reading from some of my own work. In my lectures I had in mind always one definite idea—that of helping others bear their burdens. Not that I wanted to belittle or befog the

reality of human sorrow or the tragedy that all too often enters into our earthly struggle; but I was determined that no regrets of mine should tinge my conduct with bitterness.

"Soon people who came to hear me on the platform were saying that I helped them. In the pleasure this gave me there was another incentive to forget what I had just passed through. To my surprise, in the midst of this success on the platform and the warmth of friendship shown me on every hand, the past was all but obliterated, shaken off as one shakes off the weight of a bad dream.

"What some might lack under similar reverses is a sense of human values. We are apt to place too much emphasis upon material success. Material success is important, to be sure, for it may open the way to great spiritual adventures; but the all-important thing is the high heart and generous activities, when otherwise one might despair.

"The philosophy that sustained me through this ordeal? It was very simple. For one thing, I saw that happiness does not depend upon the amount of property we own, but upon true friends and the opportunity to earn one's way by labor. Again, as I saw it then and as I have told myself many times since, we are in this world in preparation for another adventure in a wider and more useful sphere. I believe in the survival of the soul; that character is the ultimate outcome of mortal experience; that our present world is but a spiritual kinder-

garten for the high school ahead; that death is only the next frontier of Great Mystery. Because of these beliefs, at moments when otherwise I might have given way to depression there surged up within me this rallying cry: 'Courage! Life is but the stuff to try the soul upon!' "

One day in 1916, about five years after he had lost all of his money, he was working on a long poem. There were many pressing engagements ahead of him; lecture engagements which he was forced to take in order to make a mere living. He desperately desired to finish that poem, but he knew that he must lay it aside.

Suddenly bitterness swept in on his soul. It did not seem right and just, that in an age of such colossal material wealth, he should have to slave to keep food in his home; when he ought to have a right at that age to do his creative work. But one of the beautiful things about Edwin Markham is that he holds no resentment over the debacles of yesterday and he has no bitterness in his heart against any man. He is always trying to apologize for the friends who inveigled him into these schemes through which he lost his money, the savings of a lifetime. He is always saying to us: "They thought they were doing the right thing. They really wanted to help me."

On that strange day when the first wave of resentment swept in on his soul he cried out to himself: "No! I shall not let you in! There shall be no

hatred in my heart. Love will outwatch the stars!" That wave of resentment subsided; his old philosophy of love came back and he found himself absent-mindedly drawing on a sheet of paper two circles; and then, before he knew what had really happened, he had written down his most famous quatrain, a terse and tremendous summing up of all of his philosophy of love, his social singing, his religious faith—"Outwitted":

"He drew a circle that shut me out—  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout,  
But Love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him in."

Edwin Markham is a Christian because he loves Christ and he lives the Christ life by the severest test, and that is, that he does without things. He lives in a manner that will astonish the world when it discovers the facts.

I remember time after time, when I have taken him to some hotel or private club for a rather luxurious meal, that he has been uneasy all through that meal. At first I wondered what was the matter. I noted his uneasiness. One day I asked him what bothered him, and he said, as simply as a child: "I cannot bear to be sitting down to this wasteful meal when I think of the thousands of people on earth who do not have enough to eat. Why do we not eat in some more moderate place and save the money for others? I do not believe that, if we are followers of the lowly Nazarene, and take



him seriously, we have any right to eat more than necessity requires." This is not the impulse of a day or an hour. It is the consistent attitude of a lifetime of taking the spirit of Jesus seriously. He never fails in that generous instinct of Brotherhood.

He did not have electricity in his home until a very few years ago. I well remember the letters that passed between his home and mine in Kansas City, when this new luxury was introduced in his absence from his humble home in West New Brighton, New York. He offered his hopeless protests against that innovation because he felt that he could not afford it. Most of his lifetime of creative work he has been living in a house with none of the modern advantages which electricity offers, because he not only believes in living simply but because he is compelled to live simply.

One day he said to me, a bit wistfully: "I wish we could have a little Ford car just to ride around our island in on summer days. We have never owned a car. I would be happy just to have a humble little fellow all my own."

That was not said complainingly, but wistfully. It has always seemed to me that this industrial age has not dealt fairly with one of its great creative geniuses in this particular respect; and in a moment of impulse I once presented this matter to Mr. Henry Ford, but nothing came of it.

It has always been difficult for me to get the poet

to ride in Pullman cars. Only in extremely long jumps will he take a sleeper. If his train starts as late as midnight, I cannot get him to take a sleeper. He sits up. He says that he does it for two reasons: to save the extra expense and to ride with the common people. And I know him well enough to know that there is no melodrama about either reason which he offers. I go to the Pullman car of a morning to greet my ordinary lecturer; but when I go to meet the greatest living poet America has to-day, I know that I will find him climbing down from a day coach after the average night's ride.

One day within the past year we had to hurry from one speaking engagement to another, and I suggested that we take a taxicab. He protested and asked if we could not make it in a street car. I told him that that would be impossible. Thereupon we got into a cab. On the way to our engagement he said, rather simply: "I have taken taxicabs only a few times in my life. They are too expensive. The subways and street cars are my vehicles." This was not said ostentatiously or boastingly, but as simply and sincerely as a child would speak.

Simply, even poorly dressed, because he does not have fine clothes, wearing old battered hats, an old overcoat that some friend has given him, whether it fits or not; that is the picture that we who love him have of him, and shall have to the end of time. I doubt if he has ever willingly indulged in luxury on his own account, save in the house of his wealthy

friends, and then he offers a silent protest on behalf of the underfed and the poor of the earth.

He lives simply in his own home, as simply as a peasant, yet he is glowingly and gloriously happy in this simplicity. Never has his sympathy for the hungry of the earth been blotched by luxurious living. It is a part of his very life.

One day in Detroit we were attending a Tuesday Noonday Lunch Club. The waitress asked Mr. Markham what he would have to drink. He carefully asked her to bring him a pot of tea, a pot of hot water, and a lemon. That very week we attended a Thursday luncheon in that same room, and the same girl waited on us. But, much to Mr. Markham's delight, she brought him what he had asked for two days previously without being asked to do so. She had remembered. The poet smiled a gracious smile of appreciation. After lunch he insisted upon seeing Mr. William Klaire, the manager. I asked him what he wanted to see the manager for. He said: "To tell him about that girl's thoughtfulness. Most people make complaints when employees of a hotel do things wrongly. I believe that we should go out of our way to commend them where it will count when they do something fine like that girl did."

We found Mr. Klaire. He was delighted to have this reported. It was a beautiful experience. The girl was called in. She wept a little. We all felt like it. It was like some Upper-Room experience in

that little business office. Why? Just because a simple old man was putting the gospel of Jesus to work in actual everyday life.

He is always thoughtful of other people. Invariably, in spite of his sense of economy, he will send a wire to an anxiously waiting committee where he is to speak, telling them the exact details of his arrival. I have often protested that this is unnecessary. He always says: "I put myself in their place. I would want to know. It relieves their anxiety. I always do it."

For fifteen years I have watched him thinking of others first; I have watched him living the poetry he sings.

He lives it. He also lives the Christianity he sings. He lives it down where most of us do not—in the realm of things, money, luxury, and comforts. He says: "We who are Christians have no right to have anything either for ourselves or for our children that we do not want everybody to have; and that we are not willing to do our part to see that everybody has. There is no place in Christ's plan for 'Haves and Have-nots.'"

Not only does he preach this spirit in poetry and pulpit; he lives it in his everyday life. This age of machines, I have no doubt, will live to look upon a great soul, a man who has written immortal verse which will be living when this age has been forgotten; will live to see him die not having owned an automobile, the single great symbol of the machine



age. Things and machines do not bother the poet of the people.

He is a Christian who lives his Christianity in a world of things, machines, wheels, and luxuries—he is not touched by them. He has risen above them. He is not aware of a world of things and material.

Half of the time I doubt if he is aware of food, or clothes, or money, or time. I have had him come to my home in May and remain either in my home or the home of friends, until August. He does not seem to be aware of time or place. He is as happy in one city as in another. He always carries with him his world of idealism, his world of the spirit. He comes the nearest of any human being living to-day to fulfilling our idealistic picture of a true poet.

My picture of Edwin Markham's "other-worldliness" is not exaggerated in the least. He is a miracle in this machine age. He is one of the few living Christians and poets.

There is a strange miracle in the Markham youth.

At eighty this man walks, lives, and talks as a man of thirty. Whereas most men are burned out at his age he still has burning within him the fires of youth.

He will start out, by himself, on a three months' trip which I have arranged for him, through ten states, from New York to Texas, making often two and three speaking engagements a day; sleeping in day coaches at night, picking up meals where he

can; laughing, shouting, exuberant, boyish; making friends on every train, at every wayside lunch room; in depots, hotel lobbies; giving himself to every human being he meets with an overflowing, expansive generosity, such as I have never seen in any other personality.

He has that strange gift of rejuvenating men half his age. It is my own invariable experience that, within two hours after he has come into my home, I feel the springs of energy quickening in my body. He actually, through the sheer buoyancy of his everflowing spiritual wings, lifts me up, quickens my blood streams, and awakens my physical energies. He gives all who come in touch with him a new lease on life. No person can be in his presence for an hour and not feel the streams of renewed physical life flowing in his veins.

He walks the halls and rooms of your home at night, singing little songs to himself. He writes his poetry to the humming of hymns. That is why his poems are so musical. Many, many nights have I heard his low humming far into the dawn. Sleep seems to mean little to him, and what he loses by keeping late hours he can make up by sleeping on trains, in the daytime, and wherever he is. He sleeps like a babe wherever he happens to be if a moment of relaxation comes.

His health and overflowing energy at eighty are phenomenal. He himself declares that he has "A Truce with Time" in these words:

"Time and I have a happy truce:  
He found at last it was no use  
To blunt his swinging scythe on me:  
So he agrees to let me be.

"I am to speak no ill of Time,  
But wreath his brow with frequent rime,  
Proclaiming all the wondrous things  
He has in store for clowns and kings.

"And he, to keep his word of grace,  
Will pass me with averted face—  
Will leave me on the green, forsooth,  
Dancing with Love and Starry Youth."

Not only does Mr. Markham carry in his spirit this defiance of the years, but those who know him intimately have noted that the years do not deface the spirit of youth on his countenance. Edwin Arlington Robinson gives us this gay quatrain on Markham:

"Time, always writing, sees no trace  
Of all he writes on Markham's face.  
On Markham's face, he writes in vain:  
Apollo rubs it out again."

One night I scolded him because for several nights he had stayed up in his room into the wee small hours. I heard him humming. He promised me that he would sleep that night. But about two o'clock I heard his humming. I jumped out of bed and saw a light shining in his room. He heard me, and snapped it off like a bad boy. I went back to bed and waited. When he thought that I

was asleep, on went his light again. I jumped up again and off snapped the light in his room, for all the world like a culprit caught in an unholy act. When I had carried on this little drama of the night for half an hour, I got tired, smiled, and dropped off to sleep. The next morning he grinned at me, and arose as fresh as a flower for another day's speaking engagements.

His physical vitality is so great that he takes the whole world into his heart. He has abundance and enough for all. One day I took him into the Kansas City Athletic Club for lunch. The waiters there knew him and loved him. Wherever we eat regularly on his visits, the waiters know and love him and look upon him as a friend. That day the head waiter said: "The only seat we have is right here in front. Will that do?" I turned to the poet and said: "Here is the only table we can get. Is it too conspicuous?" His eyes flashed, he lifted his Jovian voice and thundered: "Sir William! It is not conspicuous enough!"

When he sits in a public dining room he takes in the entire room as his auditors. Contrary to the usual feeling, this is not embarrassing. It seems to be his natural right. When he tells a story it is not just for a single table but for the entire room; and the entire room likes to be included. He lifts his voice and laughs aloud—and the world listens and listens gladly. There is a world-contagion in his spirit, and he never goes into a waiting room, or



a dining room or a hall but that he is the center of all eyes. His energy overflows to and for all. He is humble, but likes to give himself to all.

We shall picture him meeting two young sales-girls in one of America's largest book stores. I call them over. He has never seen them before. I say to him: "Mr. Markham, this is Miss Sally Gallishaw, and Miss Hunt." They have never seen him before, and he has never heard of them. His eyes begin to flash fire. He reaches out his great friendly arms. He gathers them to his heart—a true father-heart—as though they were his daughters—and says something like this: "Ah ha! So this is Sally Gallishaw? So this is Miss Hunt? I have been waiting all these years for this moment! Now my cup is full and running over. I have known you girls before the ages began. I can hardly believe my own eyes; that I am seeing you at last."

It is a poet talking, but ah, the overflowing energy, the contagion of it, the beauty of it, the reach of it, the heartening lift of it. We all know that it is a poet talking, but we like it. It takes us in. It makes us forget time and we live in Eternity.

I have never heard him speak an unkind word of a single human being in fifteen years. He loves even those who have done him an unkindness—and there have been a few who have taken advantage of his honesty, his simplicity, his confidences—financially and in other ways. But he is always and for ever apologizing for them and explaining away their

faults—even when those mistakes have made him suffer.

He works all the year around. He never takes a vacation. He has not had a vacation in a quarter of a century. He has never been to Europe.

He overflows like a great Nile River and enriches the soil of humanity with his physical and spiritual buoyance and exuberance. He is the most abundant human being physically and spiritually I have ever met. He emits sparks and electrical power with every handshake. His eyes and his fingers spit fire. He brings an electrical atmosphere like a summer thunderstorm when one comes into his presence. He is Dawn, he is Youth even at eighty years of age. That to me is one of the miracles of Markham.

He is not only wonderfully prolific but he is an exquisite workman. He has made more than a hundred changes in his two great poems, the Lincoln poem and "The Man With the Hoe." My own copies of these books are interpolated in a dozen places, where he has revised them. He never ceases to work on his poems. He is the most exacting and careful workman I know in the arts. Few people know this, but they will know it some day when the final appraisal of his magnificent work is made.

The spirit of his method of work is set forth in his own poem "A Workman to the Gods," from *The Shoes of Happiness*.

"Once Phidias stood, with hammer in his hand,  
Carving Minerva from the breathing stone,  
Tracing with love the winding of a hair,  
A single hair upon her head, whereon  
A youth of Athens cried: 'O Phidias,  
Why do you dally on a hidden hair?  
When she is lifted to the lofty front  
Of the Parthenon, no human eye will see.'  
And Phidias thundered on him: 'Silence, slave:  
Men will not see, but the Immortals will!'"

In another poem, "How the Great Guest Came," he pictures Conrad the Cobbler working away at his mending of shoes, waiting for Christ to come to his lowly door. It is another expression of the spirit of Markham's workmanship as he sings in these descriptive lines:

"Doubled all day on his busy bench,  
Hard at his cobbling for master and hench,  
He pounded away at a brisk rat-tat,  
Shearing and shaping with pull and pat,  
Hide well hammered and pegs sent home,  
'Till the shoe was fit for the Prince of Rome.  
And he sang as the threads went to and fro:  
'Whether 'tis hidden or whether it show,  
Let the work be sound, for the Lord will know!'"

Mr. Markham works like a sculptor chiseling away at a Greek column, not a stroke too much, carefully, prayerfully, conscientiously, like a Phidias, an Angelo, a Da Vinci with chisel or brush. He is a workman working for immortality. You cannot hurry him. Now and then he lets a poem go out

for a special occasion which does not have this indication of workmanship, but the dominant universe of the man is exactness and divine precision. In the rare cases in which he allows a poem to go forth in an unfinished form it is usually because poverty compels him to set aside that larger urge of workmanship for the urge of need and responsibility to his family.

I watch him sitting through the preliminary program of a meeting, with pen in hand, working, working, working away on his poems, changing, polishing, revising, until they are fit for eternity.

In this same way I have watched for years an insatiate, childlike eagerness to learn. He carries a little notebook, and he never talks with a human being without jotting something down in that book. He visits much with a group of theological students I am teaching these days, and he says, "I learn a lot from them!" Many of them have told me of how he asks them to repeat a certain phrase or viewpoint so that he can get it down in his book. I see him sitting in a church service, and always he is taking down thoughts that the most humble preacher is speaking. I have never seen him in a public audience where another man was speaking that he was not jotting down something.

If simplicity is greatness, Edwin Markham is one of the Immortals.

His sophistication is *nil*. He is surely a child ready for the Kingdom according to Christ's own



definition. If hobnobbing with wealth, kings, and the great of the earth, and still retaining a child-like simplicity, still remaining untouched with worldliness is the mark of greatness, then Edwin Markham is one of the spiritual Mount Everests of the earth.

No man living in these states has ever been more honored than he. From the day of the furore and the tempest caused by his "Man With the Hoe" to the day he stood reading his poems before thousands of people at Carnegie Hall on his eightieth birthday celebration, he has had the adulation of the earth. He has been called by Max Nordau: "A great poet: a Miltonian ring in his verses, and a Swinburnian richness in his rimes and rhythms. I place him higher than Walt Whitman."

Of him Ella Wheeler Wilcox said in her day: "The greatest of the century."

No anthology is complete without his poems. Preachers and lecturers and writers quote him so often that his poems have become a part of the very vocabulary of the day. His poems have been set to music, they have been dramatized, and acted. He lives in all of our American literature.

One hot Sunday night in Globe, Arizona, I took him to a Chautauqua tent, because all of the churches were closed and uniting in a union service in that far-away spot. We were returning from the Grand Canyon. The lecturer closed his lecture by quoting a poem of Mr. Markham's. He did not

know that the poet was in that tent. After the lecture was over I took the poet up and introduced them. The lecturer was dumbfounded. He said: "I have been quoting your poems for a quarter of a century in Lyceums and Chautauquas. This is the first time I have had the honor of meeting you. It is hard to say which was most pleased: the lecturer, myself, or Mr. Markham at this dramatic illustration of the reach of his creative genius. He was as pleased as a little child with a toy. He never seems to get used to eulogy and appreciation. It always comes to him as an exciting surprise. With all the honor that has been flooded through his life he still receives recognition and appreciation with the sweet simplicity of a child, who does not know that he is a great genius. Even the words of appreciation that come from students, the fact that they preach on his poems, that they use them for illustrations, please him immensely.

One would think to watch him when he reads of a good word said about him that he had never heard good words spoken of himself before. Honors such as have come to few men living have come to him, but he still gets a surprise and a joy out of even the most insignificant tribute. He cherishes it in his heart. Only one thing can account for this perennial joy when honors come, and that is a great and noble simplicity of character: the antithesis of egotism, the simplicity of greatness.

Perhaps "The Man With the Hoe" will live

longer, but "Israfel," which he wrote in a world-wide contest for a poem interpretative of Poe, is the most exquisitely lyrical poem he has ever composed. It appeared in the *Poetry Review* of London and was adjudged the best of two hundred poems submitted from every nation. Alfred Noyes and five leading editors were judges. No man knows Markham's true soul who has not saturated himself with the lyrical lines of "Our Israfel." It is not published in any of his books, but it is in a separate pamphlet. Side by side with this is "The Ballad of the Gallows Bird." He has written innumerable shorter poems of exquisite musical quality which have never yet been seen by his reading public. We who have been close to him for these years know that he is now writing the most beautiful poetry he has ever written. And, only the indifference of a machine civilization has kept these poems from general circulation.

. . . . .

Have I said what I started out to say? I feel as one who attempts to grasp some gigantic globe in the tips of his sensitive fingers. It is so huge that it slips away.

Once I crossed Lake Lemman at sunset. The great west was glowing with gold, crimson, opal, amber behind the Alps of Switzerland. We watched this glowing sunset from the deck of the little steamer in mid-Lake Lemman. Then the west turned to purple, the sky grew dim, the evening star appeared.

The sunset was finished. Two of us sat in subdued silence for ten minutes after that sunset, our heads down on our breasts; sat in solemn silence. The sunset had done something to our souls.

In the midst of this solemn silence my friend exclaimed: "Look yonder to the east! Look at Mount Blanc. It looks as if it were sunrise."

For a few minutes we could not figure out what it was. Then the captain came along and explained it to us. The sun which had set ten minutes before that, was still bombarding with its gigantic rays of light the peak of snow-covered Mount Blanc because it towered so high in the east. It still caught the rays of a sun which had now set.

When Edwin Markham goes—and go he must in the inevitable evolution of time—the light of his great life, of his great poetry, will shine for a thousand years after he has gone, lighting up the great Mount Blanc of his social spirit, of his social teaching and preaching; lighting up the hope that shines in his heart for a Brotherhood of Humanity. That light, shining with even a greater power when he has gone, will be the light of what I call the Miracle of Markham, the Man.

And, when he goes, we shall know what he is doing over there in the "next existence," as he himself calls it. It will be what he has so constantly done here. We shall know, because he has told us in "The Gift of Work," curiously enough quoted from "The Gates of Paradise":



"When I have touched the end of days  
And bid farewell to earthly ways,  
I have one thing to ask of Him  
Who sings above the seraphim—  
The gift of work—more work to do  
To let God's glory glimmer through.  
For well I know that in the Lord  
More work will be our work's reward.

"Perhaps the Master's lips will say:  
'He touched one heart upon the way,  
So give some further work to him;  
But he must draw the lines less dim—  
This time must not so bungle there,  
But give his sketch a nobler air.  
He must put action in that curve;  
Give to the feature more reserve.  
His early colors were too thin:  
He now must dash the beauty in  
With bolder stroke'—This is the plan:  
More work; by work we build the man!"

One day I asked him how he would like to make his triumphal entry through "The Gates of Paradise."

Quick as a flash he replied: "In the front line trenches! I want to be battling for social righteousness. No pinochle, no solitaire, no loafing about on soft chairs for me! I have none of the aches and pains, none of the organic weaknesses of old age. I should like to go out that way—and make a joyful exit and a shouting entrance from the platform which has been my habitat for so many years. I should like to go just after reading the last stanza of 'Lincoln, the Man of the People':

'So came the captain with the mighty heart;  
And when the judgment thunders split the house,  
Wrenching the rafters from their ancient rest,  
He held the ridgepole up, and spiked again  
The rafters of the Home. He held his place—  
Held on through blame, and faltered not at praise—  
Towering in calm, rough-hewn sublimity.

'And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down  
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,  
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,  
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.' "

To those who have heard Mr. Markham's reading of this poem that would seem an appropriate passing. In those last lines the poet comes to a great thunderclap of Jovian utterance. With lifted hand, pointing to an imaginary "lordly cedar," with eyes flashing lightning, he blasts this line: "Goes down with a *great shout* upon the hills."

Then, waiting a perceptible length of time in what he calls "the dramatic pause," with reverence and hush of heart, he almost whispers those words of majestic beauty: "And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."

The good God may grant the poet's wish to go as he reads those lines. Or the good God may not. But certain it is that whenever and however Edwin Markham may go he will leave "a lonesome place against the sky."

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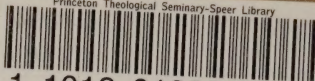
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